



CRCOG Weekly Legislative Report

2019 Legislative Session

March 14, 2019

Weekly Legislative Feature Issues:

Another week at the Legislative Office Building has been very busy with the Appropriations Committee continuing their work on the expenditures side of the legislative budget proposal. While the Appropriations Committee public hearings on the budget ended last week, the committee has commenced work group meetings focusing on specific items that were raised when the executive agencies gave their presentations during the public hearing.

On the revenue side, the Finance, Revenue, & Bonding Committee has begun holding agency presentations for their General Bonding Subcommittee. These meetings are important, because they provide valuable input into the subcommittee's bond recommendation decisions for the authorization of new bonds or reauthorization of bonds previously enacted. These recommendations are considered by the full Finance, Revenue, & Bonding Committee for inclusion in the committee's bonding package.

Lastly, the General Assembly convened for a legislative session on Wednesday, March 13, 2019. When they met, the legislature took action on several legislative and executive nominations before concluding its business for the day. Of particular note, the Senate confirmed the nominations of Rollin Cook as the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and former state senator Tim Larson as the Executive Director of the Office of Higher Education.

This past week has revealed new developments of particular interest to you:

Homeowners with Failing Foundations Ask Legislators to Pass Nine Bills Tackling Everything from Quarry Standards to Mandated Home Inspections

An estimated 34,000 Connecticut homeowners could be impacted by the issue of crumbling concrete foundations at the hand of pyrrhotite. It's no wonder that nine bills aimed at alleviating this crisis are in the works at the capitol. One such bill would mandate insurance companies, which have previously denied claims concerning this concrete issue, to cover the cost of repair. Another such bill would allow for condominiums to apply for funding from the Connecticut Foundation Solutions Indemnity Company (CSFIC); condominiums are currently excluded from the fund due to a loophole. Receiving the most support from homeowners was a bill mandating the testing of concrete by the Department of Consumer Protection for the problem-causing pyrrhotite traces. One other notable bill would require at-risk homeowners to conduct an inspection of their foundation and disclose the presence of pyrrhotite prior to selling their home. While many homeowners expressed concern that CSFIC funds would run out before all the victims are assisted, State Rep. Tom Delnicki assured homeowners that the crumbling foundation caucus has already raised this budgeting issue to Governor Lamont's attention.

[Hartford Courant: Homeowners with failing foundations ask legislators to pass nine bills tackling everything from quarry standards to mandated home inspections](#)

Opinion- School District Consolidation Would Overthrow Connecticut's Social Contract

Journalist Chris Powell argues that the recent propositions to either incentivize or mandate school district consolidation "overthrow Connecticut's social contract." He argues that the goal of consolidation is not to "save costs" or "increase access to resources," as Democrats have argued. Rather, he believes the end-goal of consolidation is to give cities political control of suburban schools. This "social contract" Powell refers to is the de facto fleeing of the middle class from the "poverty factories" of the city to well-funded school districts in the suburbs. But, Powell argues, it is a "delusion" that funding is the main factor in the quality of a child's education—parenting, he says, is the real decider of education outcomes. He cites an Education Department study that acknowledges no evidence correlating student performance with school spending to fuel this argument. Powell argues that, under consolidation, suburban property tax revenue will be "diverted to the futility of educating the unparented kids in the cities..." He also says that any social benefits of consolidation from "racial, ethnic, and class integration" will be offset by diminished academic performance. Powell believes that a bill like this would never be introduced in a more equally bipartisan legislative body.

[Journal Inquirer: School district consolidation would overthrow Connecticut's social contract](#)

Poll Finds That Tolls are Still Unpopular

A Sacred Heart University poll of Connecticut residents found 59% oppose electronic highway tolls, and 54.5% would seek a route around electronic highway tolls if they are installed. Only 34.7% of residents

surveyed supported the idea of tolls. 36.2% of residents were “more likely” to support tolling if funds were guaranteed to be used on road, bridge, and highway improvements. This same survey found that 39.8% of residents believe the \$100 million investment in tolls is worth the \$1 billion in expected revenue, versus 38.5% that do not believe this. These numbers were all consistent with a 2013 Quinnipiac poll and a January 2018 poll about similar issues. Connecticut’s Governor Ned Lamont took these results as a win, touting the news as proof that Connecticut residents will support tolls if the Lamont administration can emphasize that the funds are federally mandated to go toward transportation infrastructure. Although opposition to tolls hovers around 50%, Lamont believes he can convince residents of their efficacy.

[CT News Junkie: Poll finds that tolls are still unpopular](#)

Proposals to Consolidate School Districts Leads to Confusion and Fear as Legislators Look for Ways to Save Money

Near the beginning of the session, Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney proposed a controversial school district regionalization bill that would seek to realign districts “in a manner similar to the probate districts.” Looney wanted to use the probate courts—which were reduced from having 117 districts into 54 less than a decade ago—as one example that broad scale regionalization in Connecticut is possible. There are currently three plans for school regionalization under consideration. Looney’s bill, Senate Bill 738, has probably received the most opposition; it requires towns with populations fewer than 40,000 to consolidate districts. This would affect about two dozen Connecticut towns. As word has spread about these bills, the Facebook group “Hands Off Our Schools” has grown to more than 8,000 members with more than 75 towns represented.

Many constituents are speaking out about the current quality of the bills. Lamont’s bill, Senate Bill 874, would require small districts—those with fewer than 10,000 residents or fewer than 2,000 students—to have their superintendent “receive direction concerning the supervision of [its] schools from another district’s superintendent or name a ‘chief executive officer’ to oversee the schools.” Lamont claims he wants to use a “carrot not stick” approach to incentivize schools that regionalize, but the current text of his bill contradictorily states that funding could be withheld from districts that do not comply.

A third bill, Senate Bill 457, would require districts with a student population fewer than 2,000 students to expand or join with other districts to get that number above 2,000. In this bill, districts that choose not to regionalize must write a formal letter to the Department of Education explaining its reasons. Concerned parents are wondering if any of these proposed bills will close their local schools or force their kids to bus miles away to a regional school. Proponents of the bill have been firm that this is not their intent. The intent of the bill, according to bill supporters, is to incentivize schools to combine administrative functions, share resources, and pool back-office services.

[Courant: Proposals to Consolidate School Districts Leads to Confusion and Fear as Legislators Look for Ways to Save Money](#)

Tracked Bills:

Please see attached document.