



OFFICE OF THE FIRST SELECTMAN

Michael R. Criss
First Selectman, Town of Harwinton
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
February 22nd, 2023

Good afternoon, my name is Michael R. Criss, I am the First Selectman for the Town of Harwinton and I am submitting testimony regarding H.B. 6659 “An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2025 and making Appropriations therefor”.

H.B. 6659 “An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2025 and making Appropriations therefor”.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and submit testimony on proposed bills regarding H.B. 6659 “An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2025 and making Appropriations therefor”.

Although we appreciate the Governor’s commitment to maintaining municipal aid at current levels, we are very concerned that many small towns are faced with reductions in funding, including education funding, despite record state budget surpluses. This is occurring at a time when inflation and other factors are driving up the cost of delivering education and other critical services. This is compounded with the fact that education funding has not been kept in-line with inflation over the last 12 years.

Under the proposed budget:

- 64 small towns will see a reduction in overall municipal aid.
- 42 small towns will see a reduction in municipal aid of more than \$100,000.

Given inflation, rising costs for energy, construction, healthcare, and emergency medical services as well as increasing costs to manage solid waste, address PFAS, and remove dead/decaying trees, towns are faced with alarming increases in the cost of delivering critical services.

TOWN OF HARWINTON

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Education Funding

The town of Harwinton recognizes the importance of increasing education funding for municipalities that have been historically underfunded. However, under the changes to the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, many small towns are faced with sizable reductions in education funding and are struggling to address rising costs. These reductions are compounded by the loss of federal funds under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief program (ESSER).

Without additional education funding, many small towns will be forced to increase property taxes and/or continue to cut municipal programs and services. Harwinton recommends increases in education funding as called for in HB-5003 and a continuation of the hold harmless provision under the ECS formula. We further recommend that the State Board of Education be willing to work and grant waivers of MBR to ensure quality education at a reasonable cost.

Special Education Funding

In addition, Harwinton appreciates efforts to address concerns regarding the level of special education funding authorized last year, which was not sufficient to hold towns harmless under the recently enacted tiered reimbursement formula. However, special education costs continue to escalate, placing a difficult cost burden on towns and taxpayers.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in opposition of H.B. 6659 on behalf of the Town of Harwinton. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Michael R. Criss
First Selectman, Town of Harwinton
Vice Chair, Northwest Hills Council of Governments
Legislative Chair, Northwest Hills Council of Governments

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