

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

**Hearing Room 2B, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut**

Monday, December 7, 2015 – 1:00 P.M.

Members Present: Scott Jackson (Chairman, OPM), John Filchak, Robert LaFrance (DEEP), James O’Leary, Rob Michalik (DECD alt.) Mike Muszynski (CCM alt.), Leo Paul, Scott Shanley, Joyce Stille and Lyle Wray

Members Absent: Carl Amento, Sen. Stephen Cassano, John Finkle, Barbara Henry, Rep. Frank Nicastro, Lisa Roy and Michael Stupinski

Staff: Bruce Wittchen

Others: Mary Glassman, Joseph Riter

Opening Remarks:

1. Call to Order

Commission member Jackson called the meeting to order at 1:09 and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Consideration of the draft minutes of the October 1, 2014 meeting

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft minutes and the motion was approved unanimously, with Rob LaFrance, Rob Michalik and Lyle Wray abstaining.

3. Consideration of ACIR reports

a. 2015 session mandates report

Bruce Wittchen explained that this report focuses on mandates created, modified or reduced in this year's legislative sessions. There was a discussion to broaden a reference to the burdens mandates place on "local officials" and a decision was made to refer instead to the burdens placed on municipalities. Bruce said he will make that change before submitting the report.

b. 2016 mandates compendium supplement

Bruce explained that this report has a different format than the previous report as it is the annual supplement to the large compendium of mandates issued every fourth year. This report is not due until after the next legislative session begins.

c. 2014-2015 municipal budget adoption experiences report

Bruce explained that this report refers to the 2014-2015 budget year and added that data collection for the 2015-2016 report is underway. He provided an overview of the report and noted that the median budget increase was 2.5%. There was a discussion of Sec. 207 of PA 15-244, which will reduce state funding to municipalities that increase their budget by 2.5% or more from one year to the next.

d. 2014 annual report

Bruce explained that annual report reports certain highlights from the ACIR's other reports and he had nothing to add. Commission member Jackson asked for a motion to approve the reports and a motion was made and seconded. It was approved unanimously.

4. Old Business:

a. Other

There was no old business.

5. New Business:

a. ACIR Mission and research project

Commission member Jackson said he had joined the ACIR three years ago and remembers sitting next to Scott Shanley and asking what the group does. He does not want the group to just meet to approve reports; he considers the ACIR to be uniquely positioned for research on budgetary and other issues and noted that other ACIRs have been associated with research institutions.

Commission member Jackson said the ACIR should be considering potential topics for research. He said the group should seek to make changes and asked who do the members want the ACIR to work with and in what areas. He mentioned health districts and probate courts as being examples of regionalizing services. He noted that, during his time as mayor, only one budget came in with an increase below 2.5%. He noted the potential budget implications for a town trying to still get by with a volunteer fire department and said he hopes this group can contribute.

Commission member Wray noted that he's been involved with other ACIR's in the past and said CT, more than other states, has to promote regional approaches for 911 call centers, health departments and other services because of our lack of county government.

Commission member Wray said the ACIR's work is valuable and noted that the [Federal Reserve Bank of Boston](#) has staff expertise and can do pro bono research in support of the ACIR. The state's needs go way beyond the ACIR's review of mandates, especially with the intergovernmental division of responsibilities being less clear due to the lack of counties.

There was a discussion of Federal Reserve studies and Commission member Filchak said good work was done regarding 911 call centers. He also pointed out the need to

consider improvements in quality from regionalization, not just the potential cost savings. He noted that a fully-staffed health district can provide more services than a part-time local health department.

Commission member Stille said small and large towns need to consider different approaches. Following up on that, Commission member O'Leary said his region's 911 dispatch center includes 20 towns and Torrington's participation is important because of its 24-hr police and fire departments. He wondered if Torrington benefits from its participation to the same extent that smaller towns do.

Commission member Wray said a larger dispatch center is more resilient and noted that New York's center didn't crash on 9/11/2001. A larger center has more capacity and it can provide greater specialization. He said new regionalized services have a 5-10 year roll-out period and, while doing something like combining school back offices can save money, it can take years to do it. It requires leadership and trust. He noted that [CRCOG](#) has not experienced a divide along the party line.

Mary Glassman said this is an opportune time for the ACIR to play a big role. The process will require data, leading to best practices, leading to action. There was a discussion of setting and enforcing standards. If a health department or district cannot meet the minimum standard, merge it into a district that can.

There was a discussion of how no state entity other than the ACIR is charged with fostering regional cooperation and that no one else can coordinate the needed changes. There can be progress, but the state has to accept responsibility and establish time frames and penalties.

Commission member Paul pointed out that not many towns coordinate between their own town government and their school board. Statutes should direct them to cooperate. There was a discussion of the ACIR's role and that its role is not to lobby but to point out problems and suggest improved approaches.

Commission member O'Leary said the issues are complex and the ACIR met monthly 20 years ago. [CCM](#) had a big project underway 15 years ago, but all these efforts dwindled. He noted that a town's CEO has some control over local costs, but what about when services are regionalized? The ACIR should look at such problems and said there are white papers on this dating back 20 years.

There was a discussion of the possibility of small towns sharing a full-time finance director and that the point is not necessarily to save money but also to improve service. Commission member Filchak said a UConn research institute used to do such work, are there any others? He noted that there is not a planning office at OPM.

Commission member Muszynski mentioned municipalities fighting over economic development as each tries to build its grand list. Commission member LaFrance said a number of [DEEP](#) initiatives cross municipal borders and noted the agencies work on climate change, waste streams, microgrids and sewer systems.

Commission member Jackson said the state cannot make things happen immediately and Commission member Paul said the ACIR should determine its role. Commission member Jackson answered that the ACIR is an advisory group, but does include two

legislators and can do publications, like CCM can, showing how intergovernmental cooperation can work. The ACIR can identify options.

Commission member Paul asked what OPM needs to help the ACIR's efforts and there was a discussion of how the ACIR can enhance its standing. Commission member LaFrance said the ACIR could foster the development of standards for finance directors and others, a role similar to roles of other agencies. Commission member Jackson said it will be important to require outcomes.

Commission member Filchak said MA provides this kind of leadership and information; CT doesn't. The ACIR has to go beyond what we currently do. Commission member Stille recommended working with existing organizations.

Commission member Wray recommended having other contribute. The provision of technical assistance and training is beyond the ACIR's scope. We should research what might be available and bring people into the room to discuss options. Commission member Wray added that it would be in CRCOG's interest to assist in this effort by providing staff support. There was further discussion of possible research support from the Federal Reserve.

Commission member Paul quoted the ACIR's role, as stated in the [annual report previously approved today](#):

The Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) is a 24-member agency created by the State of Connecticut in 1985 to study system issues between the state and its local governments, and to recommend solutions as appropriate. The makeup is designed to allow for open discussion across broad jurisdictional lines with a common interest in bettering local government.

Commission member Paul said he is tired of traveling to Hartford just to approve reports. There was a discussion of COG's having a greater role and Commission member O'Leary said COGs provide a forum for municipal CEOs to express their leadership. There is a need for a certain level of trust.

Commission member O'Leary noted that people are pointing out that Sweden has one 911 dispatch center and southern California has 2, while CT has more than 100, but we aren't acting on that information. We need to get buy-in on the need to change and we can get that through the COGs. There was further discussion of that, of school-town consolidation and of a desire to develop a short list of the most promising consolidation opportunities.

Commission member Jackson said he will look to convene a meeting with COGs, CCM and COST to develop a list of such opportunities. This will show what the ACIR can do. Commission member LaFrance said the ACIR's work can be valuable and recommended the ACIR consider institutions that agencies already work with, such as [CIRCA](#).

Commission member Muszynski said CCM will be happy to contribute to this effort and said the ACIR should make sure its efforts are recognized. The legislature is not aware and the ACIR should think about how to get attention. Commission member

Filchak suggested the ACIR also work with people from education institutions, like UConn and Yale, and there was a discussion of possible collaborations.

Commission member Stille noted that the ACIR had not met since 10/2014 and there was a discussion of scheduling future ACIR meetings and of the relationship of the ACIR's mission with the legislature's [MORE Commission](#). Commission member O'Leary said things happening during the legislative session become future mandates. Commission member Jackson noted the difficulty of bringing ACIR members together more frequently.

There was a discussion of alternative options for meeting, but Commission member LaFrance recommended the ACIR get together in January because people will pay attention. Commission member Jackson said he will reach out to COGs and said we will look into meeting the 3rd week of January.

6. The next meeting will be at a time and place to be determined

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM