



## **Testimony in Opposition to Proposed S.B. No. 935**

**Submitted by Frank Ricci, Labor Fellow**

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My name is Frank Ricci and I serve as Yankee Institute's Labor Fellow. Yankee Institute is a policy organization dedicated to empowering Connecticut's people to forge a brighter future for themselves and their families.

I retired as a Battalion Chief after a 28-year career as a firefighter, with 22 of those years serving in the city of New Haven. I spent 16 of those years as a union official — serving as an executive board member, vice president and then retiring after winning two terms as president.

Yankee Institute opposes this bill. SB 935 seeks “[t]o require that municipalities employing police officers and firefighters provide such officers and firefighters with pensions through the Municipal Employees Retirement System or another system that offers comparable or superior benefits.”

First responders risk injuries and death, placing your safety above their own. Our firefighters and our police officers are willing to widow their spouses and make their children parentless to keep the communities they serve safe. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

But this bill is not about dignity and respect. It is about imposing another unfunded mandate on the taxpayers, without regard either for property taxes or the current law.

Connecticut has some of the most robust collective bargaining laws in the nation, and our first responders already benefit from them. In fact, this legislative body passed the Municipal Employee Relations Act (MERA), which provides a mechanism complete with binding arbitration where unions and management can adjudicate any impasse.

This bill is a solution in search of a problem. In 2019, the town of Branford restored defined benefit pensions for police officers as a management proposal through the bargaining process.

Management's position was motivated by a free-market effort to attract top-notch officers. Competition for quality candidates will incentivize municipalities to restore benefits.

The City of West Haven likewise is increasing pay and restoring pension benefits after seeing a mass exodus of qualified police officers. Whatever the trend, however, no municipality should be handcuffed with blanket mandates made far away at the capitol, where there is not specialized knowledge of unintended consequences on local budgets.

Municipal Collective Bargaining Agreements are negotiated with full knowledge of local budget constraints and the unique needs of the community. This allows negotiators to balance the interests of both workers and the taxpayers.

After good faith negotiations, some fire departments and police departments agreed to accept the benefit package voted on by their members. These were negotiated with the municipality after formal negotiations, and based on a multitude of factors that did not result in an arbitration award.

Now, rather than returning to the bargaining table, this bill flips the table on the taxpayers in a bad faith attempt to circumvent the very agreements they negotiated.

This bill is like having a home buyer sign a contract to purchase your house at a price certain, and then lobbying the legislature to retroactively reduce the amount they are required to pay you. A deal is a deal. All collective bargaining agreements have a finite number of years outlined in their duration clause, and the union will then be able to take another lawful bite at the apple.

This bill showcases an even more pernicious phenomenon: Union leaders seeking to circumvent the bargaining table altogether, instead relying on political horse trading at the capitol, far removed from any transparency or accountability to local taxpayers.

SB 935 may be well intentioned. However, the result would be another unfunded mandate passed down to municipalities without regard for the taxpayers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testify before this distinguished committee.

In Liberty,  
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