



## **Testimony on HB 5796**

**Submitted by Bryce Chinault, Director of External Affairs**

January 31, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Planning and Development Committee in support of [HB 5796: An Act Requiring Public Comment Periods at Public Agency Meetings](#). My name is Bryce Chinault and I am the Director of External Affairs at Yankee Institute. Yankee Institute is a public policy organization in Hartford that is dedicated to bringing transparency to public policy.

Yankee Institute supports HB 5796 because it empowers the public to engage with policymakers, will bring further transparency to government actions, and increases the likelihood that state and local governing bodies will consider all the effects a policy may have throughout Connecticut.

HB 5796 empowers the public by ensuring that everyone can formally express their support or opposition to a policy or proposed reform. This change would encourage everyday people to pay closer attention to state and local government as they would have a clear avenue to voice their opinion. We regularly receive questions from our supporters across the Constitution State about how they can make their voices heard and this reform gives them the opportunity they are looking for.

As a result of empowering the general public, actions taken by state and local governments will be made more transparent. If more community members engage in the policymaking process the greater the likelihood will be that details of legislation and regulations will be better understood by the public. Government officials will also be more likely to respond to real constituent concerns.

With a more empowered general public and more transparent governing bodies, state and local governments will be less likely to adopt harmful policies. If a new regulation will drastically increase the costs of doing business, threatening employment and economic vitality, the public will be able to formally engage in that rulemaking process to stop the change. Residents of a town will be able to push back on unwanted zoning reforms or encourage changes in our police forces and fire departments. Parents will be able to challenge potentially harmful changes at our public schools or improve community center programs. These are just a few potential examples, and the list of potential benefits is at least as numerous as the topics regulated by our state and local governments.

With this change, Connecticut could join a number of other states that ensure the right to participate in public meetings. An organization called Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press provides information on where this right is observed across the country: <https://www.rcfp.org/open-government-sections/a-is-there-a-right-to-participate-in-public-meetings/>.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5796: An Act Requiring Public Comment Periods at Public Agency Meetings. I hope this testimony serves as a modest example of how we can all benefit from allowing the public to testify at public meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Bryce N.Y. Chinault

Yankee Institute - Director of External Affairs

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