



Testimony on House Bill 7209

Submitted by Isabel Blank, External Affairs Manager

February 27, 2019

Good morning. My name is Isabel Blank, I am manager, external affairs at the Yankee Institute for Public Policy. We submit this testimony in opposition to **House Bill 7209**, “An Act Establishing the Connecticut Municipal Redevelopment Authority.”

We are very concerned with the powers given to a quasi-public agency in this bill.

Our most serious concern is with the section that gives this new Authority the power to condemn property (lines 244-249). This essentially gives it the power of eminent domain. Giving an unelected body the power to take private land sets a dangerous precedent, and we are opposed to this provision.

We are also broadly concerned with the creation of another quasi-public agency, which by definition will be less transparent and less accountable to state residents than a fully public agency. This is an entity that would be able to enter into contracts, borrow money, manage property, oversee construction and renovation projects, among other powers. At a time when our state is going on a “debt diet” we should certainly not create another agency that can borrow money. This authority would have substantial control over many parcels of land across Connecticut, with very little accountability to local government leaders, and even less to the people of our state.

Another provision that is troubling is that the Authority would have the power to collect fees in lieu of property taxes, siphoning away money from municipalities (lines 317-336). Given Connecticut’s extremely high property taxes, and the poor fiscal health of many of our municipalities, we cannot take money from them and give it to anyone, let alone an unelected Authority.

In general, the Authority is given far too much power over local municipal leaders. Again, given the lack of transparency and accountability inherent in quasi-public organizations, this is not a good way for the state to encourage development.

The bill also creates tiers of municipalities – only municipalities with over 70,000 inhabitants would be able to join the Authority, while others would be forced to join based on their lack of fiscal health. What a strange way to do the state’s business.

For these reasons, we oppose this bill.