

My name is Richard Holton. I am President of the Hartford Police Union, proudly representing over 400 men and women, who at great personal risk serve the residents, businesses and visitors of the City of Hartford.

It's my privilege this morning to speak on behalf of our Hartford Labor Coalition, made up of 11 bargaining units that represent first responders, educators and other public service workers who are the quiet heroes of our city.

Over the last twenty years, the majority of Connecticut's towns and cities – not just Hartford – have struggled at times to balance their budgets and attempt to put themselves in sound financial positions.

Our capital city, with more than half of its property being tax-exempt because it is owned by the state, educational institutions, nonprofits and religious groups, is uniquely challenged to balance its budget.

We recognize that Mayor Bronin faces a daunting task of closing significant budget deficits over the next few years. We have been and are prepared to partner in that effort through the process of collaboration and cooperation. Alienating everyone through divisive legislation is no way to accomplish this task.

We are here today; to state publicly what we have said to the Mayor all along, that we are prepared to work hand and hand with the city to identify cost savings in order to protect vital public services through the collective bargaining process. The process can, has and will work. There is no need to create a "Hartford Sustainability Commission."

All of the unions present here have helped the City of Hartford during difficult financial times in the past. I can tell you specifically that the Hartford Police Union in their last contract established tremendous cost savings measures for the city, including two years of no wage increases, restructuring of their pension plan design and retiree health care plan.

These changes have saved the city approximately \$3 million in the city's annual pension liability by 590,000 thousand dollars and saved the city hundreds of thousands of dollars annually in retiree health care cost.

Each of the unions in our coalition can point to similar contract settlements that were negotiated in good faith and included significant sacrifice by the workers they represent and we stand ready to do it again.

We urge Mayor Bronin to start the bargaining process and schedule meaningful bargaining sessions so we may discuss structural proposals that would yield significant cost savings for the City now and for years to come, such as:

- Getting all Hartford municipal and Board of Education employees on a single healthcare plan design to leverage maximum premium savings;
- Explore entry into the state employee health insurance plan;
- Establish a Hartford Health Enhancement Plan to encourage inexpensive preventative care and avoid costly emergent or chronic care;
- Discussing options that could yield millions in ARC and unfunded pension liability savings;
- As well as several other structural changes that are unique to each bargaining unit that could yield the city significant cost savings.

Because we represent 11 bargaining units of varying size and compensation levels, it is difficult at this time to say exactly how much these proposals would save, but we feel confident they would be significant cost savings. Due to the Mayor's lack of transparency and when the actual deficit numbers are made available and vetted, it will be even easier to set and reach cost savings goals.

We love the city in which we work and as the city is facing a financial crisis we are committed to being part of the process to develop solutions with residents, business owners, property owners and others to restore the city's financial stability.

On behalf of our coalition, I want to thank the entire Hartford legislative delegation and the Hartford City Council. Thank you for recognizing the importance and historical value of the collective bargaining process and that the negotiation process can and will work. Your partnership and open lines of communication in problem solving dialogue has been greatly appreciated, helpful and remain very important to us.

I ask Mayor Bronin to listen and take to heart these words once said by Henry Ford "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success".

Now, I would like to introduce Rep. Matt Ritter who will speak on behalf of the Hartford legislative delegation.