Council President, Clarke and the Court of Common Council, I am Richard Holton, President of the Hartford Police Union. I am here to speak for my 400 plus members in opposition to any resolution supporting the Mayors proposed legislation in the form of SB 464.

There are three areas I would like to cover.

First, is the so called comparison of the Mayor's bill to the Waterbury bill. This is the furthest thing from the truth, Hartford is not Waterbury. Never mind the difference in the makeup of the oversight board and the denigration of the Council's Governmental power, (like the loss of veto power and the right to approve employee contracts) as well as attacking the retirees. Waterbury was and still is a Finical disaster, they were less than a month from making payroll, they borrowed from the pension fund to pay bills, they were in junk bond status, their pension fund was only funded at 4% and they failed to have a property revaluation for several years.

Waterbury Mayor O'Leary testified at the Capitol and he even said that Hartford is not in the same shape Waterbury was in, even though he praised the Mayor for his efforts he failed to talk about the devastating effect the State oversight had on the City's workforce, and currently he is seeking to increase the city's mill rate by almost 2 mills on a 490-million-dollar budget.

Even though previous Hartford Mayors have increased the mill rate, Hartford is not in any danger of not making payroll, we are no way near Junk bond status, our pension fund is funded at 78%. So don't be fooled into thinking that SB 464 is the Waterbury bill it is not and Hartford is not Waterbury.

Secondly, every union leader has said the same thing, the Mayor has not had any serious discussions in regards to contract negotiations. He has not sat down and produced a budget mitigation plan showing us where he has made and identified cuts and where that puts him and where he needs to be with the help of the unions. By not doing this he has put this city severely behind the eight (8) ball.

To say he needs the oversight to negotiate contracts with the Unions is absurd. Every Union has and will help the city. In our last contract we took two (2) years of no raises, reorganized our pension plan and retiree health care. By doing this we saved the city approximately 3 million dollars in wages, decreased the city's pension liability annually by Five hundred ninety thousand (590,000) dollars that's approx. 2.3 million dollars since the contract was signed; by removing the six thousand (6,000) dollars for retiree medical stipend we have saved the city approximately six hundred (600,000) thousand dollars, with additional savings going forward. So as you can see we have always worked with the city in "good faith". A lot could be said for the Mayor's actions and "good faith" is not one of them.

Third and finally, the issue of looking for solutions. One of the biggest obstacles of getting through this fiscal crisis is the fact that according to "hartford business.com"' the city has about 59% of tax exempt properties valued at approximately 3.7 billion dollars. No city in this country could operate or better yet balance a budget with almost 60% of its property being tax exempt.

This has to be addressed. You can't balance the budget on the backs of the employees. We have to look at every option available to us. To say a savings in one area is not not good enough, as the Mayor has told us, in my opinion is irresponsible. We have even suggested the idea of the City doing its own towing, it could create jobs and bring in revenue, road and 911 service fees on tickets sold at the City's entertainment venues, as well as on renters who unless they register their vehicle in the city do not pay any taxes but use the city services. These are just a few of the ideas and I am sure you have a laundry list as well.

The Hartford delegation is not in favor of the Mayor's bill as written, members of this Council are not in favor of the Mayor's bill as written and the workforce is not in favor of the mayor's bill as written. As expressed during the public testimony at the Capitol, members of the finance committee have said, the Mayor has put the cart before the horse and I can't agree more. As a city facing a crisis we need to come together and work on solutions, some of these can be accomplished thru "good faith" negotiations, legislation (changing the tax structure) and brining all of the stakeholders together. By acting alone and alienating everyone is no way to accomplish what everyone wants and that is to make Hartford viable and sustainable.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Sgt. Richard Holton
Hartford Police Union
President