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*CPHA is an affiliate of
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TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
IN OPPOSITION OF *THE INTEGRATION OF LOCAL
HEALTH DEPARTMENTS.*
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH
MARCH 7, 2017

Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee. I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Public Health Association where I serve as Co-Chair of the Advocacy Committee. The Connecticut Public Health Association (CPHA) opposes recommendations to consolidate local health departments, as are included in various bills currently under consideration by this Committee including HB 7170: An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding the Integration of Municipal Health Departments into Regional Health Districts.

CPHA's mission is to represent and unite the diverse expertise of Connecticut's public health professionals, to ameliorate the most pressing public health issues in the state, and to promote health and safe living for the people of Connecticut. CPHA has long supported local health departments as critical to achieving that mission and maintaining a healthy and safe living environment for Connecticut's residents. All public health is local, and local governmental public health systems that provide the public and our communities with access to full-time, comprehensive public health services that align with national standards are essential.

CPHA recognizes that there are challenges with the current governmental public health structure, but points out that state investment in local governmental public health has decreased over the past 15 years. As a result, the importance of local investment and connectivity has become even more important. Local health departments have maintained healthy communities by focusing on and addressing

the unique needs of their constituents. Local public health needs are best met when communities have the flexibility to develop unique solutions. Regionalizing health departments would disrupt the infrastructure that has been established in order to address those needs. Further, current proposals to regionalize do not properly account for the challenges such a structure would introduce.

There is currently no administrative structure in place to support large regional entities. Additionally, the proposed structure would provide no alternative to local leaders on the delivery of their public health services. This would inherently remove public health from local municipal decision making. Such an arrangement would decrease the ability of municipalities to meet the needs of their residents, while potentially requiring them to participate in public health activities unrelated to the needs of their residents. This type of regional approach is not only ineffective to address public health needs, but could also waste funding on solutions that are not properly tailored to the communities they intend to affect.

Local public health services benefit everyone in a community, but they often especially benefit those residents of lower socioeconomic status. Developing large, regional health districts may require residents to make much longer commutes, negating the effectiveness of local public health services. In fact, many residents may not be able to access these services at all due to transportation barriers. Further, regional approaches may ignore the needs of small but vulnerable groups of individuals who lack a strong voice in a regional structure.

In addition to the effect on the public health services provided, there are numerous other considerations that have not been addressed by these proposals including the existing assets of health districts and how they will be handled, compensation packages for existing local health department staff, and municipal reliance on local health districts for services outside of their scope. Overall, the current proposals do not adequately address the breadth of consequences this change could have on Connecticut residents.

CPHA recognizes the need to improve local health efforts, but believes there are alternative approaches to regionalization. Therefore, CPHA opposes HB 7170 and similar bills and urges the Committee to assess other options to improve the efficiency of local public health delivery.

For additional information on CPHA's position on HB 7170 or other issues related to health equity, public health infrastructure, environmental health, or prevention, please contact Jenna Lupi, jenna.lupi@gmail.com or 203-804-3562.