

February 28, 2021

Via Email Only

Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr., Chair  
HOUSE CORPORATIONS COMMITTEE  
R.I. General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Re: Opposition to H 5629

Dear Mr. Chairman:

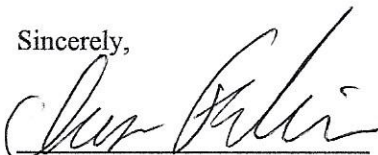
As you know, H 5629, among its several amendments to existing General Laws, seeks to remove the authority of a fire district to collect unpaid fire district taxes "in the same manner that taxes assessed on real estate are by law collected;..." This amendment to the enforcement of tax payment through a collection process that includes tax sale is essential to ensure all property owners pay their taxes timely and that delinquent taxpayers not transfer their obligation to pay onto the remaining taxpayers to cash flow operations and expenses. This amendment is unfair to all honest, responsible taxpayers since they would be most impacted if delinquent taxpayers are not subject to a tax sale. The Exeter Fire District is opposed to H 5629.

Since its inception in 2004, the Exeter Fire District has resisted holding tax sales on delinquent accounts annually. Instead we use a three (3) year window to allow taxpayers to bring their account current. The sale that we hold, each year in June, uses the third year looking backwards as the trigger year. If you're on the current year's sale list, you are delinquent for the current year, as well as the two (2) prior years. And you have been reminded each year, on your new bill that taxes are owed on this property. During your third delinquent year (the tax sale year) you receive a call and a letter from our collector informing you of your delinquency, as well as the availability of payment plans to help you become current. This is all done prior to any legal proceedings being initiated against a delinquent taxpayer. In the sixteen (16) years we have been in existence, we have sold only two or three parcels of land only for payment of delinquent taxes, never anyone's home or business.

The Exeter Fire District offers circuit breaker and forbearance agreements to taxpayers that struggle with their tax obligations. While the tax sale method of payment enforcement is a last resort and not used by this fire district without hesitation and efforts at less onerous inducement methods, its removal as an essential tool will, in our opinion, encourage non-payment by some taxpayers. The collection rate will thus lower and the responsible taxpayers will suffer increased taxes to offset the loss in revenue by these non-compliant delinquents. This legislative action is dramatic, without justification and unnecessary to prevent the loss of a property for non-payment of fire district taxes when tax sales, in the Exeter Fire District are few, often successfully avoided and only used in the rarest circumstances, involving only vacant land not homes or businesses.

The Exeter Fire District is opposed to H 5629. Please do not support H 5629.

Sincerely,



Charles Franklin, Chair  
Exeter Fire District Board of Commissioners

Cc: Hon. Justin Price  
Hon. Elaine Morgan