

# RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

“OPPOSING 2025-S 1010 and 2025-H 6249”

## Resolution No. 2025-63

WHEREAS, in the Town of Coventry,

- The course of the last several decades serves as the best evidence of the operational and fiscal instability in the Town of Coventry’s fire districts. For example:
  1. The Western Coventry Fire District (“WCFD”) has raised taxes by nearly 40% over the past five years and yet WCFD’s chronic struggles with adequate staffing levels and fiscal instability persist leading to a habitual reliance on their fund balance to cover structural operating deficits—an action that, at the municipal level, would normally trigger action by the Office of the State Auditor General.
  2. The Town has been forced repeatedly to intervene in the financial failures of Coventry’s fire districts. For example, in 2013 a \$300,000 emergency loan was provided by the Town to prevent the shutdown of the Central Coventry Fire District (“CCFD”), after an order of the Superior Court placed the district into liquidation, with Associate Justice Brian Stern stating:

“As a practical matter, it is now unfortunately the Town of Coventry’s problem.”
  3. In late 2023, another loan was made to CCFD by a neighboring fire district – the Coventry Fire District (CFD) - to ensure that they were able to make payroll.
  4. Due to a myriad of operational matters, particularly inadequate staffing levels, underperforming fire districts, through Mutual Aid, routinely rely upon better-managed, neighboring fire districts and municipalities to provide fire and EMS/rescue services to Coventry’s residents; and
- Such operational and fiscal instability strike at the heart of the health, safety and welfare of Coventry’s 35,000-plus residents; and
- Following a referendum on November 7, 1972, the Town of Coventry adopted a home rule Charter (“Char.”), which became effective on January 1, 1973. Thereafter in 1973, the General Assembly expressly ratified, confirmed, validated, and enacted in all respects the entire Charter. *See, Coventry Sch. Comm. v. Richtarik*, 122 R.I. 707, 711, 411 A.2d 912, 914 (1980).

- The essence of Char. Article XII recognizes: (1) the Town’s responsibility for the safety and welfare of its citizens for firefighting, fire prevention, rescue, and other public safety functions; and (2) grants the Town Council the authority to establish a municipal fire department; and
- In recognition of the vital importance of reliable and professional fire and EMS/rescue services for its 35,000-plus residents, the Town Council has taken several deliberate and thoughtful measures to better ensure the health, safety and welfare of its residents, namely:
  1. In November of 2022, the Town Council commissioned a consultant, Dynamix Consulting, to conduct an independent assessment and to provide a report (“Dynamix Report”) concerning the Town’s current fire district model; and
  2. On August 27, 2024, the Town Council established the Coventry Municipal Fire Commission (“Fire Commission”) via Resolution 2024-66. The Fire Commission is an eleven-member group comprised of the Town’s Manager, Finance Director, Solicitor, and Chief of Police, as well as two members of the Town Council, one designee from the International Association of Firefighters Local 3372, one designee from the fire dispatch union, and one non-union designee from each of the four fire districts; and
- In January 2024, the Town Council received the Dynamix Report, the essential conclusion of which is that Coventry’s current fire district model is unsustainable, and that a unified, Town-managed, municipal fire department is the most viable, long-term solution for providing reliable firefighting, fire prevention, and EMS/rescue services to the residents of Coventry in order to best protect their safety and welfare; and
- The Fire Commission is charged with preparing a comprehensive implementation plan that provides strategic recommendations and analysis to the Town Council concerning the feasibility of a municipal fire department with an eye toward establishing such a department as part of Town government; and
- The Fire Commission’s report of recommendations and analysis is due to be received by the Town Council in late July 2025; and
- Presently pending in this 2025 legislative term of the Rhode Island General Assembly are bills 2025-S 1010 and 2025-H 6249. Both bills seek to (1) preempt the Town’s ongoing and aforementioned efforts to stabilize and unify fire and EMS/rescue services; and (2) permit continued district-level taxation even after the formation of a municipal fire department – essentially permitting competing taxation authorities within Coventry as to fire and EMS/rescue services; and
- Allowing the continued operation of Coventry’s four (4), fragmented, independent fire districts places an undue financial burden on Coventry’s taxpayers, and puts public safety and welfare at risk by enabling continued operational and fiscal instability; and

- 91 • If both 2025-S 1010 and 2025-H 6249 become law, they will have the effect of: (1)  
92 undermining the Town's duty and authority granted to it by and through its legislatively  
93 ratified home rule Charter; (2) disrupting the ongoing, lawful and inclusive reform process  
94 undertaken by the Town Council to establish a path toward the formation of a municipal fire  
95 department; and (3) exposing the residents of Coventry to additional and unnecessary  
96 financial burden without eradicating the present dangers posed to the safety and welfare of  
97 Coventry's residents; and  
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99 • The Town of Coventry requests that the General Assembly NOT approve proposed  
100 legislative enactments 2025-S 1010 and 2025-H 6249.  
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102 **NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Honorable Town Council:  
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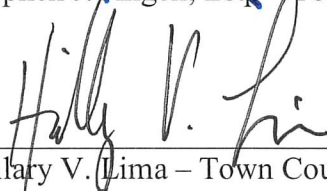
- 104 1. Takes the position that the Coventry Municipal Fire Commission ought to be allowed to  
105 complete its research and due diligence to deliver a comprehensive and complete report to  
106 the Coventry Town Council with respect to the long-term safety and welfare of Coventry  
107 residents free of State intervention in this local policy exercise.  
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109 2. Is OPPOSED to the passage of 2025-S 1010 and 2025-H 6249.  
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111 3. Respectfully, urges the Rhode Island Senate and House, respectively, to REJECT 2025-S  
112 1010 and 2025-H 6249 in order that the Town of Coventry may complete its legally  
113 authorized, community-based process to stabilize fire and EMS/rescue services in Coventry.  
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115 4. This resolution shall take effect upon passage.  
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117 5. The Town Clerk is directed to certify a copy of this Resolution and to transmit or deliver  
118 certified copies of it to: the Coventry State Legislative delegation; the Speaker of the Rhode  
119 Island House of Representatives, and the President of the Rhode Island State Senate.  
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121 Sponsored by: Council President Hillary V. Lima  
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123 Resolution approved as to form and substance:  
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127 Passed or Denied on a vote of 30  
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Stephen J. Angell, Esq. – Town Solicitor

  
Hillary V. Lima – Town Council President

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131 Certification by Town Clerk by:  
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Joanne P. Amitrano- Town Clerk