

Statement of Vicki A. Tesoro, First Selectman of Trumbull
In Opposition to Senate Bill 475- An Act Increasing the Sales Tax Rate and Dedicating the
Additional Revenue to Municipalities.

02/19/2019 -- Good Morning Chairman Rojas, Chairman Fonfara and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. I wanted to join you in person for the public hearing today, but I was unable to due to scheduling conflicts. I appreciate your full consideration of my comments and concerns.

In Trumbull, we are experiencing firsthand the tenuous state of brick and mortar retail in Connecticut. We have a regional mall (Westfield Trumbull Mall) and a smaller mall (Hawley Lane Mall). We have numerous retail centers in addition to our two malls like many communities. All of the malls and retail centers are struggling through the transition in the retail industry. In 2017, more than 8,700 stores closed in the United States. Closures are continuing with a number of national retailers declaring bankruptcy just this week. The advent of online retail giants offering low prices and swift delivery has had a drastic effect on the industry and the real estate that once housed vibrant retail centers. The site of vacant retail space is becoming all too common. Trumbull has been working tirelessly to keep these retail centers vibrant, recently approving a new mixed use zone for Trumbull Mall. We need to do everything we can to keep these centers vibrant and competitive. They are job centers for many folks in the greater Trumbull area. The Trumbull Mall alone provides over 3,000 jobs with approximately 30% of those jobs being held by Bridgeport residents, our neighboring city.

While I can appreciate the effort to seek new ways to support increases in municipal revenue, I feel strongly that SB 475 will do much more harm than good. To increase sales tax at this tenuous time for brick and mortar retailers will only hurt the shopping environment at our malls and retail centers, a blow they cannot afford, especially now. We need to support the transition in retail very carefully. When stores close, folks lose jobs. The more vacant storefronts, the more the real estate is devalued. These two realities will hurt municipal revenues and are very real unintended consequences of putting retailers at a further disadvantage by raising the sales tax.

If members of the committee would like to talk further about Trumbull's experience with the challenges facing the retail industry and the impact on municipalities, I will make myself and my director of economic and community development, Rina Bakalar, available for meetings, calls or tours to experience first-hand what we are facing. I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 475:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/TOB/h/pdf/2019HB-05700-R00-HB.PDF>