

March 9, 2009

Board of Finance  
TOWN OF NEWTOWN  
45 Main Street  
Newtown, CT 06470

Re: BOS Rejection of Collective Bargaining Agreement Extension;  
"Fairness for Town Hall Workers"

Chairman Kortze & Board Members;

My name is Karen Pratt-Szilagy and I work in the finance department for the Town of Newtown. I am also the President of the CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 Chapter that represents 50 of the Town's public service workers.

I am submitting this statement to respectfully urge the Board to recommend that the Board of Selectmen reconsider their February 9 decision to reject extending our current collective bargaining agreement with the Town.

As I am sure you are aware, the Board of Selectmen agreed to a similar contract extension for the union representing the Town's Highway Department workers in December, and ratified a 3-year contract with the Town's Parks and Recreation Department with similar wage increases in November.

We made our request believing that the time, effort, and energy spent negotiating a new contract during this period of economic uncertainty would be better spent working together to resolve issues with the Town's budget.

In our January 7 letter to First Selectman Borst, we made the point that tabling negotiations would benefit both the Town and our Union in many ways. For example, it would allow us to work with state elected officials on investing resources in Newtown from the proposed federal economic recovery legislation. Since that time, the President has signed the bill into law, which will pump \$3 billion into Connecticut's economy.

We were surprised that the Board of Selectman didn't ask all of our unions' leaders to meet and work together to find cost-saving solutions, as many local elected officials across the state have done. We are more than willing to do our part to help, and simply want to be of a broad comprehensive plan.

In making our request, we simply asked the Board to agree to the same general wage increase and

maintain the same employee share of health insurance premiums for our members for another year. That was essentially the same request made by the Town's Highway Department workers.

We were surprised and puzzled that the Board rejected our request. It should be noted that the membership of the Highway Department's union is exclusively male and the Park and Rec's Department is all male with one exception; ours is three-quarters female. We are naturally concerned that the Board of Selectmen may be discriminating against our Chapter on the basis of gender.

During stressful economic times like these, residents turn to the town for services at an increasing rate, And we, in turn, take pride in providing those services to meet residents' needs. All we ask is to be treated fairly, and to bear a burden that is comparable to, not greater than, other employees in Newtown, regardless of the department they work in or their gender.

Again, I urge the Board of Finance to recommend that the Board of Selectmen extend our current collective bargaining agreement with the Town for one year. That will empower our members to focus on delivering the services Newtown residents and businesses need, and deserve, during these difficult times.

### **Karen Pratt-Szilagy**

Finance Department, Town of Newtown

President, Newtown Town Hall Employees Chapter, CSEA SEIU Local 2001

CC: First Selectman Joseph Borst  
CSEA SEIU Local 2001 Executive Council Members  
CSEA SEIU Local 2001 Legislative Action Committee Members  
Municipal Division Council Officers & Chapter Presidents

KPS:dmo