



*The Beacon Hill Institute for
Public Policy Research*

News Release

8 Ashburton Place
Boston, Massachusetts 02108-2770

phone: 617.573.8750
fax: 617.720.4272
email: bhi@beaconhill.org
web site: www.beaconhill.org

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Contact:
Frank Conte, Communications
617-573-8050; 8750
fconte@beaconhill.org

Tuerck: Civilian flaggers would still cost less than police details

BOSTON – The Commonwealth of Massachusetts would save money by substituting civilian flaggers for police details. This is according to testimony before the Executive Office of Transportation & Public Works, provided today by David G. Tuerck, Executive Director of the Beacon Hill Institute.

Tuerck joined other invited experts to discuss Section 10 of Chapter 86 of the Acts of 2008, which authorizes the Office of Transportation to formulate recommendations for using civilian flaggers to direct traffic around public works projects. Tuerck cited data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics whereby the top wage for civilian flaggers (or “crossing guards” in BLS parlance) is \$16.23 per hour in Delaware. “If the rate for civilian flaggers at work sites in Massachusetts was twice this level,” said Tuerck, “it would still be less than what it costs to hire uniformed officers to do the same work.” Said Tuerck: “It is a forgone conclusion, therefore, that, by using civilian flaggers rather than police details, the Commonwealth could save money on public works projects.”

Tuerck rebutted the argument made by the police unions that the pay of civilian flaggers would be subject to the state prevailing wage law. It is not a forgone conclusion at all, said Tuerck that personnel hired to direct traffic around a public works construction fall under the aegis of the prevailing wage. “If a police officer or a civilian flagger directs traffic around a site where the construction of a school is underway, he does not perforce become a member of the teaching profession and neither does he become a member of the construction trades.”

Tuerck argued that, even if the prevailing wage law applied to flaggers, the wage deemed to “prevail” would end up being less than what the state and municipalities pay for uniformed police. In closing his remarks, Tuerck also called for reform in work rules. The state could save money, he said, by limiting the number of uniformed police at a single work site to one and by limiting pay to the actual number of hours worked, rather than some minimum. He also said that competition from civilian flagging companies that could hire retired police officers would be an improvement over the current system.