

# Hartford Passes “Big Box” Store Public Access Law

Issue: [Related Issue](#)

**For Immediate Release**

Monday, December 13, 2004

**Contact Information:**

Paul Sonn, 212 998-6328

## **Hartford Passes “Big Box” Store Public Access Law**

*Community and Labor Advocates Must Be Allowed Access Retail Stores on City-Owned Property*

**Hartford, CT** — The Hartford City Council voted Monday night to enact a local ordinance protecting free speech in the parking lots and sidewalks of retail stores operating on city-owned property. A proposed Wal-Mart store slated to be built on property leased from the Hartford Housing Authority is likely to be the first facility affected by the new law.

“In the past, Hartford’s downtown business district was a place where workers, shoppers and the public could engage in free speech with one another,” said Jo Winch, chair of the Hartford City Council’s Labor and Workforce Development Committee. “But as our downtown is replaced by privatized malls and Wal-Marts, we need to make sure that those opportunities aren’t lost. This new law does just that.”

The Hartford ordinance marks a new response by communities facing the expansion of Wal-Mart and other big box retailers across the

country. Rather than attempting to keep big box stores out of Hartford, the ordinance aims to mitigate some of their potential impacts on the community. The Chicago City Council is also considering a proposed ordinance that includes similar public access requirements for large retailers in that city.

“These new laws help ensure that community members can distribute information about a retailer’s business practices to customers and employees in the location where they are most likely to pay attention – at the store itself,” explained Nathan Newman, associate counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. The Brennan Center helped draft both the new Hartford ordinance and the Chicago proposal, and provided legal and policy assistance to advocates in both communities.

“We need to protect free speech and workers’ rights in Connecticut,” said Jon Green, Director of the Connecticut Working Families Party, a coalition of unions and community organizations that fights for economic justice issues. “This new law guarantees that we will be able to talk to shoppers and workers about concerns raised by retailers like Wal-Mart.”

The new ordinance requires that any retail store built on city owned land in Hartford must allow the public to engage in non-disruptive free speech in non-business areas such as parking lots and sidewalks.

The first stores to be affected by the new law are being built on the former site of the Hartford Housing Authority’s Charter Oak public housing complex. When the complex was demolished in the mid-1990s, the Housing Authority had initially planned to replace it with a mixed use manufacturing, retail and housing development. Instead, the new shopping center being developed by CBL & Associates Properties, Inc. will be anchored by a 216,000 square foot Wal-Mart “supercenter.”

For more information, please contact Paul Sonn at (212) 998-6328

*The Brennan Center for Justice is a public interest research and legal advocacy group affiliated with NYU School of Law. The Center works with policymakers and grassroots coalitions at the federal, state and local levels to promote reform initiatives tailored to local needs.*