



DONALD E. WILLIAMS, JR.  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
SENATE  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591  
860-240-8600  
Donald.Williams@po.state.ct.us

## Testimony of

**Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr.  
Senate President Pro Tempore**

on

## **SB547 AAC ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING**

**Wednesday, February 28, 2007**

Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso, and the members of the Government, Administration and Elections Committee, thank you for considering *SB547 AAC Accountability in Campaign Advertising*.

With each election cycle, it seems that the messages of campaign ads focus less on important issues and more on unproductive, and at times, misleading negative attacks. Some campaign ads that make claims about an opponent's record do not include citations and appear intentionally inaccurate to some, while having the effect of misleading others. Moreover, our landmark public financing reforms have just gone into effect potential for public funds to be used to purchase misleading campaign ads.

SB547 simply seeks to increase campaign accountability and better ensure that campaigns for public office – especially those that are publicly financed – inspire the best in our democratic tradition. It does this by adopting a voluntary code of fair campaign practices, as six other states in the country have done, and providing an opportunity for candidates to pledge that they will abide by the code. It also amends campaign advertising law by requiring that campaign-related “robo-call” messages identify who is paying for the call within the first 7 seconds. And, it requires that campaign mailings be clearly identified with the name and picture of the candidate, that an opposing candidate's image not be altered or distorted, and that statements or positions attributed to an opponent be backed up with a brief citation.

Although failure to meet these basic advertising requirements would constitute an elections violation, our bill does not go so far as 18 other states that have enacted laws making false statements concerning a political opponent a violation of civil or criminal law. Opponents of campaign accountability claim that such protections compromise freedom of speech. Yet, even in the eighteen states with more severe penalties than what is being proposed in this bill, democracy still stands and freedom of speech lives on.

I began with the idea that campaigns should be about vigorous debate, including highlighting the differences between candidates. That will never change. In the best interests of the voters, SB547 simply asks candidates to take responsibility for their claims and adhere to what is supported by fact.

Thank you for your consideration of SB547.