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**Testimony of Andy Sauer**  
**Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut**  
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Friday, March 16, 2007

Good morning. My name is Andy Sauer, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut is nonpartisan, nonprofit citizens' lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. We have more than 4,000 members in Connecticut. We would like to thank the co-chairs of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, Sen. Gayle Slossberg and Rep. Chris Caruso, and the member of the committee for holding a public hearing today.

Connecticut Common Cause supports the following legislative proposals:

- H. B. No. 5298: An Act Concerning the Integrity of Whistleblowers and Extending Whistleblower Protections to Municipal Whistleblowers.
- H. B. No. 6249: An Act Establishing a Legislative Intelligence Oversight Committee.

Common Cause opposes the following bills as written:

- H. B. 1183: An Act Concerning the Pensions of State Employees or Public Officials Convicted of Fraud or Corruption.
- S.B. 43: An Act Concerning the Allocation of State Pensions for State Employees and Public Officials Convicted of Crimes Relating to State Service.

**H. B. No. 7372 – An Act Concerning Recommendations Contained in the Final Report of the Cochairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Government Administration and Elections Committee Regarding Events Surrounding State Elections Enforcement Commission File No. 2005-311.**

Connecticut Common Cause recognizes the need of some of the reforms outlined in House Bill 7372. The State Elections Enforcement Commission is a state commission entrusted with the enforcement and compliance of a number of state laws that are of great consequence to elections. Like the Office of State Ethics and the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission, it must be a state agency that operates with the complete trust of the people of Connecticut, including the people and organizations (e.g. candidates, campaign workers and political parties) it oversees.

The incident which precipitated the Government Administration and Elections investigation in 2006 and its subsequent report exposed several shortcomings in state law regarding the boundaries between the dual roles held by some unclassified state employees of elected officials during elections (i.e. part-time staff person, part-time election worker.) House Bill 7372 attempts to clarify the boundaries.

Connecticut Common Cause supports the aim of House Bill 7372 to limit the political activities of a chief of staff. Though the loyalties of all chiefs of staff would presumably extend to the electoral objectives of their employer (as it permits them to retain their job,) there must be a clear distinction of

what is permissible in their role as defacto managers for elected officials. Depending on the management structure adopted by an elected official, the chief of staff position can hold a tremendous amount of power and influence. Often, the chief of staff is the most-trusted person to an elected official. Connecticut Common Cause is not suggesting that elected officials' chiefs of staff act improperly when they strive to enhance the position and image of their employer. However, boundaries must be drawn. Helping an elected official perform their official duties to the ultimate satisfaction of their constituents and supporters is one thing; soliciting political contributions — often from individuals with business and/or legislation before the state — is quite another. Connecticut Common Cause believes that political contributions from individuals with business before the state can put elected officials in a comprising position — either serve the public without constraints or conditions, or bend to the wishes of political contributors.

It is in the best interests of all members of an elected official's staff to see their employer win elections, and Connecticut Common Cause and many Connecticut citizens have observed that an abundance of political contributions wins elections. It behooves individuals with business before the state, when solicited by a staffer who wields a tremendous amount of power such as a chief of staff, to give generously to an elected official's re-election campaign.

Connecticut Common Cause supports extending the state's anti-solicitation ban to elected official's chiefs of staffs. However, we believe Sec. 3 (ll. 111-122) of the bill, while appropriate in principle, could be unwieldy in application. The section prohibits unclassified state employees from "political management," which includes writing on behalf of a candidate and working for political parties. Connecticut Common Cause believes this language is overly broad. First, the responsibilities of elected officials' staff, whether it is answering constituents' calls or writing press releases, could be considered political management. Second, many staffers are involved with political parties. Prohibiting their involvement in a political party, as well as prohibiting them from making speeches, could infringe on unclassified employees' rights to free speech and association. Connecticut Common Cause recommends limiting Sect. 3 to a prohibition on soliciting campaign contributions.

Additionally, Connecticut Common Cause opposes increasing the penalties for interference of the legislative process from a class A misdemeanor to one that could yield of penalty of five years in jail. Although we do not condone violent or destructive acts of any kind while the General Assembly works on behalf of the people of Connecticut, it is a fact that the State Capitol is a rallying point for citizens and activists advocating for a cause. One group's spontaneous demonstration could be another's distraction to the legislative process. Civil disobedience, especially within the halls of government, has been a means of citizens attracting the attention of elected officials who are intent on ignoring them. Would the famous Connecticut taxpayers' demonstration in front of the State Capitol where thousands nearly prevented then-Gov. Lowell Weicker from entering the building be considered "interference with the legislative process?" This bill, if enacted, would send a chilling message to citizens that civil disobedience — though championed by some of the greatest citizens the United States has seen — will not be tolerated by the Connecticut General Assembly.

Connecticut Common Cause supports other provisions of the bill, which include:

- Requiring any person who intends to communicate with the SEEC on behalf of a person that is subject of any investigation undertaken to file with the commission a written authorization signed by the subject of the investigation.
- Allowing Elections Enforcement, Ethics and FOI to hire employees without the approval of the Department of Administrative Services; and
- The disclosure of a candidate's campaign manager.