

**Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz  
Government Administration & Elections Committee  
February 25, 2008**

Good Afternoon Chairman Caruso, Chairwoman Slossberg and members of the GAE Committee. For the record, my name is Susan Bysiewicz and I am the Secretary of the State. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of several bills on your public hearing agenda.

First, I want to commend this committee for consistently pursuing ethics reform legislation and for publicly raising and hearing such significant state and municipal reform proposals. Our state has been through some very difficult times over the past several years. Scandals in both our state and municipal governments, and in both our executive and legislative branches, have damaged our credibility in the eyes of the public. Unfortunately, the actions of a select few have undermined the public's confidence in our system, weakening our democracy. It is our duty as elected officials to restore that priceless public trust.

Public trust in our government is the foundation on which our democracy is based. Without trust, citizens have no desire to vote, participate in our democratic process or even run for public office. This is unacceptable. Given the almost daily news accounts of various state and local public officials, we all have a duty to restore faith in our government. I see no greater threat to our democracy than the perception that Connecticut is not concerned about the state of our democracy. Connecticut has been a leader in the passage of tough disclosure and ethics laws. Over the past decade, through your persistence, Connecticut has passed some of the strictest ethics and campaign finance laws in the country.

We must continue to reverse the erosion of the public's trust in their government. The best way to stop this is to simply send a clear message to the public that Connecticut will not tolerate ethical violations by supporting several proposals on your public hearing agenda. To those who say that these proposals go too far, I say that the erosion of public trust, the cynicism and apathy expressed by voters and the threat to the future of our democracy costs us far more.

I strongly support the following bills that will go a long way to restore that public trust and send a message that Connecticut is not for sale.

**S.B. #333: AAC COMPREHENSIVE ETHICS REFORMS**

**H.B. # 5504: AAC MUNICIPAL LOBBYING**

**H.B. # 5506: AAC A MUNICIPAL ETHICS PILOT PROGRAM**

As both the Chief Election Official for the State of Connecticut and as a former Chair of this Committee, I have been a longtime advocate for increasing voter registration, turnout and participation. When a select few public officials violate the public's trust in government, the foundations of our democracy are at risk. It is our duty as public officials to work to restore the public's trust. Ethics reform on both the state and municipal levels is a priority of my administration and I join you in your efforts to seek change.

I have strongly advocated before this Committee to support legislation that would revoke the pension of any public official that is convicted or pleads guilty to a crime. S.B. #333 contains this provision and I support its passage. S.B. #333 also contains a provision that makes failure for a public official to report a bribe a class A misdemeanor that I also support.

Another important component of S.B. #333 establishes a Legislative Ethics Committee. This is long overdue. I commend your efforts and courage to establish this historic Committee.

Our municipalities have also had their share of difficult times. Extending sensible ethics reforms to local governments will further improve the public's confidence in our democracy. Many municipalities have already taken a bold step forward in addressing ethics reforms in their own community and I commend their courage and foresight. I have consistently supported strict municipal ethics reforms before this Committee and urge passage of H.B. #5504 and H.B. #5506.

While it is my preference that all municipalities be required to establish a local ethics commission to address ethical violations in their community, it is my understanding that this Committee and representatives of municipal governments have developed a sensible solution that will balance the needs of municipalities with improvements to the public's trust. The establishment of a pilot program for ten municipalities to adopt an ethics code to address municipal ethics complaints is a positive first step forward and I commend all of those that developed this proposal.

I applaud this Committee for raising these bills and I offer my assistance as you proceed debating ethics reforms. This is not a Democratic problem or a Republican problem; this is a bi-partisan challenge that requires a bipartisan solution.

Thank you for your time and I commend your efforts to address such a vital public policy issue. I stand ready to assist the Committee in any way and look forward to working with you, my constitutional office colleagues, and legislative leaders to develop sensible legislation which will help restore the faith of the people in their elected officials.