



M. JODI RELL
GOVERNOR

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

Testimony of
GOVERNOR M. JODI RELL
HB 5029 An Act Concerning the Ethics Code for Government Officials

Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 5029, An Act Concerning the Ethics Code for Government Officials.

House Bill 5029, An Act Concerning the Ethics Code for Government Officials, is another step on the path upon which I embarked when I first took the oath as Governor of the State of Connecticut. As you may recall, on that historic day I made ethics the cornerstone of my administration. This proposal continues the progress that we have made by imposing strict ethical standards on our state official and employees.

My proposal would add to the list of public officials and state employees who are required to file financial disclosure statements all executive branch division heads; all professional employees of the legislature, including committee administrators, attorneys, research and fiscal analysts and caucus chiefs of staff; all state employees who have responsibility for awarding state contracts valued at ten thousand dollars or more; and my own chief of staff, as well as the Lieutenant Governor's chief of staff. All of these employees have significant opportunities to influence state policy decisions and the public has a right to know whether their actions have been affected by their financial circumstances. And, because we all know that a spouse can significantly affect one's decision-making, I have expanded the definition of "public official" to include the spouse of the Governor for purposes of the ethics code.

My proposal also requires the disclosure of additional financial information including the names of all business partners, the terms on which credit exceeding ten thousand dollars was granted, the value and term of any lease or contract with the state, any investment valued at ten thousand dollars or more, any real estate bought or sold, along with the sales or purchase price, and any gift valued at more than one hundred dollars that is received from someone other than a family member. I would also require that all statewide elected officials and all members of the General Assembly disclose any provision of law that they proposed or promoted that provides state funding for a non-state entity. I think the people of our state deserve to have access to this information, and it is high time that they have it.

I also want to close the loophole that allows state officials to accept food, lodging and other travel arrangements from non-state entities. In the real world, these things are gifts and they should be considered gifts under our code of ethics.

HB 5029 also prohibits the chiefs of staff of the legislative caucuses, and my chief of staff, from soliciting campaign contributions.

I want to take ethics reform even one step further. The time has come for us to strip corrupt public officials of their pensions if they have been convicted of a crime related to their state office. We must make sure that the consequences of public corruption match the seriousness of the crime.

And because we must make sure that public officials at all levels of government adhere to a strict code of ethics, my bill requires that each municipality in the state adopt a code of ethics by July 1, 2010.

Finally, because it is critically important that our citizens have access to information about their government, this bill amends the Freedom of Information Act to require that notice of meetings of public agencies, as well as the minutes of any such meeting, be posted on the agency's website.

In summary, this comprehensive proposal continues my commitment to ethical state government. It increases transparency and accountability and gives our citizens the information they need to fully participate in our democracy.

We have made great strides in restoring faith in government in the State of Connecticut. This proposal complements the actions that we have already taken by requiring full financial disclosure by public officials and state employees.

Thank you for your consideration of this important proposal.