

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMERCE COMMITTEE

March 5, 2009

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SB 1066-- AN ACT CONCERNING REORGANIZATION OF THE STATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES.

Good Morning Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger, Senator Frantz, Representative Alberts and Honorable Members of the Commerce Committee. My name is Justin Bernier and I am Executive Director of the Office of Military Affairs (OMA). I am also Chairman of the Connecticut Military and Defense Advisory Council. The council provides advice and recommendations to the state – at no cost – on matters affecting our service members, basing interests and defense industry. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to you on Senate Bill 1066, “An Act Concerning Reorganization of the State Economic Development Agencies.”

The Office of Military Affairs was established in 2007 by a public act of the Connecticut General Assembly. The OMA was mandated with several critical missions. In particular, it is charged with:

- Coordinating state efforts to prevent the closure or downsizing of Naval Submarine Base New London (SUBASE),
- Supporting Connecticut’s military families and enhancing their quality of life, and
- Advocating for Connecticut’s defense industry, a major component of the state’s economy and an engine of innovation and quality production for our Armed Forces.

In Fiscal Year 2008, the Office of Military Affairs expended less than \$86,000. OMA operated approximately 43 percent below budget during the fiscal year despite start-up costs associated with the new office. These savings were largely achieved by utilizing human resources organic to the Department of Economic and Community Development, internships, and electronic business practices designed to conserve funds. In fact, OMA has one full time employee – me.

While limiting its expenditures, OMA has shown significant results. With the encouragement and support of Governor M. Jodi Rell, OMA has produced legislation that would enable our troops to vote electronically when deployed overseas. OMA has also worked with the Governor

to make certain that Connecticut's voice is heard on major defense programs that sustain the U.S. Armed Forces, our national industrial base, and tens of thousands of quality jobs across the state.

Most importantly, throughout 2008, OMA worked closely with the Navy to achieve an historic agreement that will allow the State of Connecticut to improve the military value of the submarine base. A Navy spokeswoman said the initiative "highlights the commitment of the state to support the Navy." The lines of communication between the state and the Navy are as strong as ever.

This progress is strategically important. Losing SUBASE would have a catastrophic effect on the entire state – not just New London County. Closure of SUBASE alone would potentially cost Connecticut 15,000 jobs and drain \$1.4 billion annually from its economy. The state would be denied tax revenue sources, on average annually, of an estimated:

- \$728 million in personal income for Connecticut residents,
- \$49 million in net new revenue to the State, and
- \$657,000 in net new local/regional revenues.

I do not present these numbers for academic purposes. Around the corner may be another round of Base Realignment and Closure, or "BRAC." On November 29, in Waterford, 2005 BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi warned SUBASE supporters against complacency. Mr. Principi predicted that budget shortfalls would ultimately force the Department of Defense to make additional reductions in basing. "I strongly suspect there will be pressure within the Defense Department for another BRAC round," said Mr. Principi. "Please do not assume that because [SUBASE] survived the last round that you will be spared in a future call for cuts."

Senate Bill 1066 would effectively eliminate the Office of Military Affairs, outsourcing its functions to private contractors. This would be a serious mistake. The State of Connecticut needs at least one set of eyes on this prize. Other states with large federal military bases have dedicated offices with sizable staffs and million-dollar budgets. OMA is a fraction of the size of the average state's military affairs office, but it has produced results nonetheless.

I do not offer this testimony to save my job. In fact, today I am resigning from my position as Executive Director of the Office of Military Affairs. For reasons unrelated to this bill, I am leaving state employment. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve the State of Connecticut and Governor Rell, who deserves enormous credit for helping to secure SUBASE and for working to improve the quality of life of our men and women in uniform. I will look for ways to continue serving my country and my state.

In closing, I would like to thank the Commerce Committee for its support of OMA's mission over the last 16 months. I would urge the committee's members to continue that support and reconsider any legislation that would eliminate or make ineffective the Office of Military Affairs. For a cost of about \$100,000 per year, its mission is well worth the investment. The state simply cannot afford to lose the submarine base.

Thank you for your time and consideration.