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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Government Administration and Elections Committee

Monday, March 16, 2009

Written testimony opposing Governor's Senate Bill 840, An Act Concerning The Elimination Of The Office Of Consumer Counsel, The Office Of Ombudsman For Property Rights And Certain Legislative Commissions.

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the Committee:

Environment Connecticut submits this testimony opposing Senate Bill 840. This bill eliminates the Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) as proposed by Governor Rell in her biennial budget.

I have had the opportunity to work with the OCC on many occasions over the years. On each occasion, I have found their staff to be effective and efficient voices for Connecticut's consumers. Their work has helped ensure that families in our state are protected from unnecessary increases in their utility bills. The OCC has also been a voice supporting effective implementation of ratepayer-supported energy efficiency and clean energy programs that provide additional benefits for consumers as well as the environment.

Governor Rell's proposal to eliminate the OCC as a "cost saving" measure is shameless. The OCC budget is *not paid for by taxpayer dollars*. Rather, its budget comes from a small surcharge on consumer utility bills. The value consumers receive in return for that investment has paid for itself many times over in the form of lower utility bills.

The Governor's proposal to eliminate the OCC would only provide a budget savings to the state if that surcharge were instead transformed from an investment in reducing energy costs for Connecticut's families into nothing more than a *new utility tax* on consumers. Such an action would be an outrageous violation of the public trust.

On behalf of Environment Connecticut's statewide membership, and as a consumer whose family finances have benefited from the effective work done by the Office of Consumer Counsel, I urge the committee to reject SB 840.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps
Program Director
Environment Connecticut