



CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 23, 2009 Public Hearing

Statement Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director

Support For:

HJ No. 113, *Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution Concerning the Length of Term for Members of the General Assembly*

HB 5015, *An Act Increasing the Term of Office for Members of the General Assembly*

HB 6690, *AAC Municipal Lobbying*

HB 6696, *AAC Municipal Ethics*

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2100 members, supports continued improvement in the structures and procedures of the General Assembly. To this end, the League strongly supports four-year staggered terms for senators as proposed in HJ No. 113, *Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution Concerning the Length of Term for Members of the General Assembly*. Four-year staggered terms would allow senators to spend more time on legislating and less time on campaigning. They also have the added benefit of reducing the amount of money required for public financing of campaigns under the Citizens' Election Program. The League does not have a position on four-year staggered terms for House members; however, we welcome the opportunity to investigate this change as proposed in HB 5015, *An Act Increasing the Term of Office for Members of the General Assembly*.

The League also believes that the public should have confidence in the integrity of its government. Government officials and employees should be held accountable for carrying out their duties in both an effective and ethically responsible manner. To these ends, the League supports the establishment of municipal ethics commission and municipal ethics codes as applied to municipal public officials, municipal public employees, and municipal lobbyists. We also support actions to reform, strengthen and clarify Connecticut's codes of ethics as they apply to public officials, public employees and lobbyists.

HB 6690, *AAC Municipal Lobbying*, would require municipal lobbyists to register with the Office of State Ethics and wear badges while lobbying. For the reasons set forth above, the League supports these long overdue reforms.

HB 6696, *AAC Municipal Ethics*, would require each municipality to adopt a code of ethics with certain minimum standards. While we also support the establishment of ethics codes as

applied to municipal public officials, municipal public employees and municipal lobbyists, the specific provisions to be included in a municipal code as outlined in sections 3-5 are beyond the scope of our position to comment. However, we strongly believe that the same ethical standards of behavior should apply to a public official whether or not the public official receives compensation. *The League recognizes the challenge of filling positions on municipal boards and commissions and understands the desire to create exceptions for unpaid officials. However we believe that Section 3 (4) (A) provides too broad an exception and could have the unintended consequence of "enabling" situations that are fraught with conflicts of interest.* For example, is it appropriate for a member of an inland wetlands commission to represent private interests before a "sister" permitting agency like planning and zoning? We believe not and urge the committee to consider a "middle ground" for unpaid officials such as prohibiting them from representing private interests before the municipality related to his/her area of service to the municipality.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon these bills.