



Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

*TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 23, 2009*

I appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 6696, An Act Concerning Municipal Ethics.

This proposal requires all municipalities to adopt a municipal ethics code that contains measures at least as strict as are outlined in this legislation. Such measures include a prohibition on gifts to public officials and employees, a one year revolving door ban, and restrictions on consultants hired by municipalities.

Each town should adopt a tough standard for municipal ethics. Most local officials serve their towns admirably and altruistically. Sometimes, regrettably, the lines between the public interest and private interest are crossed. A code of ethics is necessary to establish bright lines and clear standards. House Bill 6696 respects the Connecticut tradition of local autonomy by creating minimum standards for local codes of ethics while allowing towns to craft their own codes.

The need for this legislation is clear. A 2004 Common Cause report indicated that 62 towns have no ethics codes and another 17 have only very limited codes. Barely half of our municipalities have some form of a broad ethics code. My office regularly receives citizen complaints about self-dealing and conflicts of interests at the local level. In half of the towns, citizens have nowhere to turn when those complaints do not include any evidence of criminal behavior.

I urge the committee to support House Bill 6696 while considering the following:

- establishing an ethics board or commission to hear citizen complaints and to render advisory opinions;
- allowing appeals of any decision of a local board or commission to the Office of State Ethics. Citizens who call my office often doubt the independence of a locally appointed board or commission. In those instances, citizens should have the right to appeal a decision to the state Office of State Ethics;
- defining the term "paid consultants". Does it include -- for example -- all municipal contractors?;

- considering the impact of these requirements on many boards and commissions that are advisory or have limited authority such as the local parade commission or beautification board.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of House Bill 6696 with these considerations.