

Statement of Norma E. Riess

March 18, 2010

Good afternoon, Senator Looney and Representative Janowski,  
Members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee:

I am honored that Governor Rell has seen fit to re-nominate me as a member of the Freedom of Information Commission, and I very much appreciate this opportunity to come before this Committee today to give you a little background about myself, and also to answer any questions you may have. I understand that you all have been given a copy of my resume, so I will try to be brief.

I was born on Long Island in 1932 and grew up there during World War II. That war had a profound influence on me, and I believe it still does. The sight of Old Glory waving still makes my heart swell with pride, and brings tears to my eyes. I was brought up in the Universalist Church, which always taught us to respect others' points of view and beliefs, to look at both sides of every issue, to be tolerant, and not to pre-judge. Looking back, I think that even then I was getting primed to be on the FOI Commission, because those are the qualifications most needed.

I went to Adelphi University, as a Language Major. I was awarded a scholarship in my Junior and Senior years because the languages I chose to study were first German, and second, Italian – both languages being highly unpopular at that time, as you may well imagine. The Scholarship was for a student who came from an English-Speaking family only. I received my BA in 1953.

As my resume indicates, I have held various jobs, and then began raising my children. This year my husband Frank and I will be celebrating our 52<sup>nd</sup> Wedding Anniversary. We raised three beautiful daughters and are now blessed with five grandchildren. When things got tough putting our girls through college, I started my own business teaching oil painting,

which I continued until 1978, when we moved to the great State of Connecticut.

We settled in Redding, a really beautiful town, and have been there ever since. It was there I learned how much closer to the people our State Government is than it is in New York.

I first became a member of the Freedom of Information Commission in 1997, and I used to wish mightily that I were a lawyer so that I could more readily understand all the "Legalese" used in the Freedom of Information Act. But I also learned that this law is for ordinary citizens, so that being a lawyer is not necessary. I realized that very often, the lawyers disagreed with each other. What is important is fairness, honest, and common sense. I have tried to bring these qualities to the Commission in my decisions. I like to think that I have contributed something toward the continuing process of insuring that the people of this state have access to the records and meetings of the public agencies that serve them.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not take the time to tell you that my colleagues on the Commission, as well as the Commission staff, have not only been wonderful to me personally in my development as a Commissioner, but are also among the finest public servants with whom I have had the pleasure to be associated. That also applies to Commissioner Vincent Russo who passed away suddenly last year in the prime of life, and for whom we had a Memorial Service just last week to install his photograph. We, his family at the Commission, miss him sorely, but the banner has been raised again by our new member. Connecticut is fortunate indeed to have such fine people working for it.

I appreciate your attention, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have for me. Thank you.