

- One of the most **important protections that resulted from the scandals was Public Act 4-204**, which prohibits the governor from reducing the annual budgets of the State Ethics, State Elections Enforcement, and Freedom of Information commissions. The law also requires the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary to include in the proposed budget documents that OPM submits to the legislature the estimates of expenditure requirements, together with any recommended adjustments and revisions, that the office receives from the executive directors of the commissions. This budget does include the watchdog group recommendations, but it also makes large cuts in these agency budgets by merging them together.
- **According to the Governor's budget the consolidation of the five agencies only achieves approximately \$1million in 2012 and \$1.2 million in 2013. Staff would be reduced from 96 to 78 – an 18% reduction. These small agencies have some of the most important jobs of a democracy and only make up .06% of the entire state budget for 2012. We believe that is a small price to pay to ensure the integrity of how our state government operates.**
- The watchdog agencies have been designed to have citizen commissions select an Executive director to ensure independence from those they regulate. **Plans for the Executive branch to appoint the Executive Director of the Office of Governmental Accountability creates the appearance that a single person who reports to a partisan official is in charge of the watchdog commissions.** A careful reading of the proposal as drafted shows that the Executive Director of the OGA, selected and answerable to the Governor, will be able to control the allocation of agency resources – such as where staff attorneys or auditors focus their work. To date, those duties and decisions have been carefully vested in staff and citizen commissions to ensure independence.

The watchdogs must maintain their independence of the Governor's office. The Executive Directors of the three watchdog groups are selected by their commissions. Those carefully structured citizen boards are made up of Democrats, Republicans and independents to ensure and balance fairness and to avoid gridlock. For example, the board members of the State Elections Enforcement Commission are selected by the Governor, Speaker, Senate President and the Minority leaders of the House and Senate so that one government group doesn't seem to exercise undue influence over the commission

These agencies have been independent of the Governor and the legislatures' control – for good reason. We all remember the problems with Governor Rowland who tried to merge the three agencies and slash their budgets when he was under investigation by both the Ethics and Elections Enforcement commissions. But even Governor Rell's chief of staff and Rell's campaign came under investigation in the last few years. Problems may not crop up again– but **we need to guard against problems now – and in the future.**

- With the exception of the Contracting Standards board which has a similar mission to the Office of State Ethics, **these are distinct agencies with unique functions with very little overlap**. The personnel has specialized knowledge and skills to perform separate duties. Each commission is charged with enforcing an entirely different set of laws, and given the unique number of responsibilities, there is little duplication of services. Some business office and administrative functions could offer some minimal savings, but not enough to offset they harm a merger would do to these agencies' important good government service.
- Additionally, **the consolidation of the three separate agencies would remove the watchdog abilities the agencies currently hold over each other**. With the different jurisdictions, methodologies and confidentiality procedures, this uber agency would be unable to effectively and fairly oversee itself. For example, if a citizen files a complaint that the Elections Enforcement Commission or the Office of State Ethics has violated the FOI Act, the watchdog agency would be both the respondent and judge. It is unlikely that the new commission would bring ethics charges against itself, and this watchdog agency would undermine the public's confidence and would have to grapple with perpetual conflicts of interest. A perfect example of this problem is that right now the Office of State Ethics is in court appealing a decision of the Freedom of Information Commission.

We are excited that in 2010 Connecticut held successful statewide elections and in 2100, special elections utilizing the Citizens' Election Program. These elections are model for the state and the nation. We are eager to work with you to figure out the best ways to go forward with government that responds not only to the current fiscal challenges but to figure out how we go forward to achieve a robust and thriving democracy. Connecticut state government has seen some rough years – and we will come out the other side tougher and stronger.

###