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Testimony of the Association of Connecticut Lobbyists

Regarding House Bill 6600

An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Legislative Paperless Task Force and the Task Force to Study the Reduction of State Agency Paper and Duplicative Procedures

Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 21, 2011

Senator Slossberg, Representative Morin, and other distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, on behalf of the over 170 members of the Association of Connecticut Lobbyists (“ACL”), we thank you for raising House Bill 6600. My name is Brooks Campion and I currently serve as President of the ACL and I come before you today to respectfully offer a brief history of the Task Force to Study the Conversion of Legislative Documents from Paper to Electronic Form, to provide context for some of the important concepts contained within the bill. It is important to note from the outset that the bill before you today represents a major step in the right direction, thanks to the thoughtful work of all four caucuses in the General Assembly, and the leadership of this committee, to engage in a more thoughtful and deliberate migration to a more paperless General Assembly.

As many of you know from your mixed experiences this session, the planned migration toward a more paperless Connecticut General Assembly has not been as smooth as many would have hoped. Last session, pursuant to Public Act 10-3, you in the General Assembly took a bold step many believed would achieve an important policy goal to reduce the consumption of paper in the production of legislative documents. Specifically, under P.A. 10-3 many of you voted to eliminate the transcription of public hearings and the printing of legislative documents including loose bills and file copies, not just for yourselves, but also for the general public. While the paperless goal, on its face, is a laudable one, in practice, it has the potential to erode the general public’s access to transparent, timely and reliable information. It was that overarching concern that prompted legislative leaders to establish the Task Force to Study the Conversion of Legislative Documents from Paper to Electronic Form.

The Task Force met last fall and heard concerns from a diverse group of stakeholders. Many argued that a complete migration toward a paperless General Assembly would have the potential to create obstacles for those persons with behavioral, developmental and/or physical disabilities, as well as for those with limited financial resources and/or

those who lack access to or proficiency with computers. To be frank, we in the lobbying community, who consider ourselves familiar with the legislative process, find the General Assembly's inner workings challenging in terms of accessing information. We believe that a truly paperless process would only exacerbate the barriers to timely access to information that already exist such as inconsistencies in the distribution and posting of substitute language among committees and floor amendments.

Beyond those very real concerns, we in the ACL believe that the General Assembly should not accelerate its paperless efforts at a time when its information technology system, the very bedrock of the paperless effort, has, at times, proven itself unreliable for the general public. As recently as Friday, February 25th, the external server to www.cga.ct.gov was offline for several hours in the morning. It's important to note that even though the information technology system is functioning for those of you in the building, the same isn't always true for the outside world. In addition, last August when you in the Senate were debating important amendments to the campaign finance law on the floor, the text of the bill was not available to the public online for over an hour due to a glitch in the external (extranet) server.

We mention these anecdotes not as a criticism of the talented individuals within the Office of Information Technology Services ("OITS"), but to underscore the current lack of technological infrastructure to accommodate escalating demand. You should be encouraged to know that the staff in the OITS has been extremely responsive and accommodating this session as the public has attempted to adapt. Going forward, we hope you will give serious consideration to capital investments in the information technology system including increased server capacity to accommodate outside user demand, improved Wi-Fi connectivity and wiring (i.e. electrical outlets in the L.O.B. and State Capitol), and increased numbers of computers and printers throughout the L.O.B. and State Capitol, to improve the public's electronic access to the Connecticut General Assembly's information system.

In addition to recommending the continued printing of legislative documents, the Task Force uniformly recommended that public hearing transcripts continue to be funded. As this committee is acutely aware, these documents are critical for legislative history and for influencing how the courts and administrative agencies construe statutes. The Task Force heard from several stakeholders from the Offices of the Chief Court Administrator, the Attorney General, the Division of Criminal Justice and the Chief Public Defender, as well as practicing attorneys and librarians, all of which urged that funding for public hearing transcripts be restored.

Thanks to the thoughtful consideration of legislative leaders to the four caucuses and their caucus chiefs, many of the recommendations of the Task Force were adopted and funding was restored for public hearing transcripts and the continued printing of certain legislative documents, including the offset bills that appear outside your hearing room today so the public might be able to follow along. We recognize that sacrifices will need to be made in the future. However, we hope in the very least that the cuts from last session are not reintroduced and further paper reductions are not made at the expense of

the public's access to timely information. For added context, we hope you will take the time to review the recommendations of the Task Force to Study the Conversion of Legislative Documents from Paper to Electronic Form for more opportunities for savings including, but not limited to the reduction in the number of statutes printed (reflected in HB 6600, Section 11 (a)) and the utilization of electronic letterhead instead of printed letterhead on bond paper (<http://www.cga.ct.gov/lm/Paperless/info.asp>).

We support the concepts outlined in the bill because we believe they strike an appropriate balance between the need for reduced paper consumption and fiscal restraint, with the public's need for access to timely information in a form that is most appropriate for them. We would appreciate the Committee's clarification of language within Section 2 because of our experience with the Legislative Bill Room this session. As you may or may not be aware, based on last session's paperless directive, the Bill Room is printing bills in an "On Demand" basis. Unfortunately, "On Demand" requests for bills are fulfilled only if the document requested is **15 pages or less**. Because the General Assembly eliminated funding for the printing of loose bills, major pieces of legislation like your very own Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes' bill, Senate Bill 1059, which is 393 pages in length, would not be made available to a member of the public who requested it at the Bill Room. Similarly this session's major energy legislation Senate Bill 1, because it is 144 pages in length, or even this bill, House Bill 6600 would not be available upon request. Had funding for loose bills not been eliminated, these documents would have been printed and stocked in the Bill Room for the public's consumption. It is for this reason that we hope that you will consider inserting the word "all" before "printed" on line 35 to make abundantly clear that the Legislative Bill Room is required to make available printed copies of any legislative document, regardless of its size, upon request.

We'd also like to thank you also for your inclusion of the important language in Section 29 that mandates the establishment of standards for the preservation and authentication of electronic documents. The Task Force was charged with studying those concepts but was understandably consumed with trying to find ways to achieve the necessary savings to restore documents and was unable to devote the time necessary to that study.

In closing, we regret having to bring these concerns to your attention at a time when you are faced with so many difficult decisions in light of your unprecedented budget challenges. We thank you for your always-thoughtful consideration.