CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 7, 2011 Public Hearing

Testimony Submitted by Christine S. Horrigan, Vice President of Public Issues

Support For:

HB 6272 AAC REVISIONS TO THE STATE CODES OF ETHICS

HB 6273 AAC THE OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

SB 880 AAC THE PUBLICATION OF STATE AGENCY REGULATIONS ON THE INTERNET

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The League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2100 members, 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 accomplish these ends, the League supports efforts to reform, strengthen and clarify Connecticut's Code of Ethics for Public Officials, as well as measures to ensure the existence of a strong, independent and effective Office of State Ethics. We also support measures designed to make government more open and transparent.

HB 6272 AAC REVISIONS TO THE STATE CODES OF ETHICS

The League supports the changes contained in HB 6272 generally; however, we believe that certain provisions merit special consideration.

- The League supports expanding the list of potential conflicts of interests under the Code of Ethics for Public Officials (C.G.S. §1-86(a)) to include "employer other than the state" as proposed in Section 9 of HB 6272. Public officials and state employees ***must be*** prohibited from using their positions to financially benefit their other employers if the public is to have confidence in the integrity of its government.

- The League also supports adding gifts to state employees to the list of gifts that lobbyists must report as proposed in Section 16 of HB 6272. Lobbyists should be required to disclose gifts to state employees as a means of instilling public trust in government and ensuring transparency and accountability. This is particularly important given the widespread scope of administrative lobbying.

While the League supports HB 6272 in its entirety, we believe that the above provisions in particular will increase transparency and public confidence in our government. The League ***strongly*** supports HB 6272.

HB 6273 AAC THE OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

The League believes that the statutory changes contained in HB 6273—staggering the term of appointments to the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board, permitting CEAB members to continue serving beyond their terms for the limited purpose of adjudicating at a board hearing, and requiring prospective members to certify their awareness of special restrictions placed on board members—are ***crucial*** to the effective functioning and governance of the Citizen's Election Advisory Board. Without these changes, the CEAB may face periods where it is unable to function due to a lack of a quorum and individuals subject to disciplinary action may "game" the system by stretching out the hearing process until the expiration of the term of one or more members of the CEAB. Excluding justices of the peace and notary publics from the term "public official" will allow such individuals to serve on the CEAB and make it easier to fill vacancies.

In addition, the League believes that clarifying and expanding the prohibitions against political contributions and other political activities by CEAB members and employees of the Office of State Ethics, as proposed in Section 1 of HB 6273, will help to restore and maintain public confidence in the integrity of government. The League ***strongly*** supports HB 6273.

SB 880 AAC THE PUBLICATION OF STATE AGENCY REGULATIONS ON THE INTERNET

The League believes that democratic government depends upon the ***informed*** and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizens' right to know by making public records accessible. As a matter of transparency, efficiency, convenience and economy, we support requiring state agencies to post their regulations on their websites.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on these bills.