



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 15, 2012

**Statement of Carol Carson, Executive Director
Office of State Ethics**

**HB 5014 - An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues
for the Fiscal Year Ending June 20, 2013**

Good Morning, Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Carol Carson, and I am the Executive Director of Office of State Ethics (OSE).

I would like to take a moment to thank this Committee and the members of the General Assembly for their continued commitment to maintaining the budgetary independence provided to the watchdog agencies – the Office of State Ethics, the Freedom of Information Commission and the State Elections Enforcement Commission – in 2004. This commitment provides the General Assembly as a collective institution with control over the watchdog agencies' budgets, and reduces the potential for inappropriate manipulation of those budgets by any single individual. Independence and budgetary autonomy allow for the important oversight of government, its officials and the electoral process, which is the foundation of government. Indeed, the first responsibility of government is to maintain the integrity of our democratic process.

Passage of Public Act 11-48, which consolidated nine independent agencies into a newly created "Office of Governmental Accountability" (OGA), occurred only after a very pointed public debate regarding the possible tension of taking these nine independent agencies – each with disparate missions and varying size – and placing them within a single agency. Because each of the nine agencies is tasked, in one form or another, with monitoring and regulating the conduct of Connecticut state government, Section 58(d) of Public Act 11-48, provided for the "independent decision-making authority" of each of the divisions to continue to independently act to complete their respective missions.

The OSE submitted updated report cards for Ethics Education and Legal Compliance and Advice. Most importantly, the Ethics Education report card demonstrates how education and training drive the mission of the Office of State Ethics. As reported, "*Research indicates that knowledge of ethics rules results in more requests for advice and more complaints filed. Requests for advice and complaints are proxies for more compliance and more compliance with ethics rules equals more ethical government.*" While we saw a downward trend in the number of trainings in 2011, the

filling of a vacant position in November 2011 will allow us to set goals to increase the number of trainings and will allow the OSE to meet its mandate to provide yearly training to all state employees.

Adequate staffing is one of the greatest challenges faced by the OSE. In 2010, the OSE was budgeted to employ twenty-one employees. Of these positions, the OSE had filled eighteen. This capacity was adequate, but not ideal, to accomplish the mission of the Office.

As a result of the ongoing budget crisis and the consolidation, the OSE now has a staff of 13, a loss of nearly 40 percent of the workforce provide for the OSE when it was created in late 2005. For a small, highly-specialized division, where all employees – regardless of title or position – are called upon to engage in multiple aspects of the division’s business, the ramifications of this reduction are dire. Although the intent of the legislature was to transfer only the administrative and business functions to the OGA, the employees that were transferred provided far more than administrative and business functions to the OSE. In particular, the absence of any administrative staff in the office to process the thousands of filings we receive annually will have a cumulative effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the OSE.

Because the consolidation process is not yet finalized (and perhaps will not be at any time during this fiscal year), recommendation of any further legislative action is premature and runs the risk of thwarting – rather than assisting – the consolidation process that is currently underway. It is the general consensus among the members of the Governmental Accountability Commission, which I chair, to refrain from legislation concerning further consolidation. Time is needed to fully assess the impact of the consolidation.

Finally, the OSE is committed to completing the consolidation contemplated by Public Act 11-48. Unquestionably, there are challenges that the OGA has already addressed, and many that will likely arise in the future as the consolidation proceeds.

Thank you for your time and consideration; we are committed to working with you.