

HB 5474 An Act Concerning the Autonomy of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority

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Joel N. Gordes

Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello, Committee Members and staff. My name is Joel Gordes and I am an independent energy consultant purely representing myself. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this bill.

I have long favored an independent department of energy for Connecticut as evidenced by the newspaper clip of 6/14/1977 inserted to the right. That was in support for such an energy agency that we had from ~1974 to 1977. It's first permanent Commissioner was Lynn Alan Brooks who was followed by Sister Claire A. Markham, RSM, Ph.D, a Professor of chemistry at St. Joseph's College. Both were very able leaders. At its height, the state energy office employed ~88 people in varied aspects of energy and was a vibrant organization until 1977, in a general reorganization, it was merged into OPM, the new super-agency.

In my testimony of February 28, 2006, on SB 48 AA Creating a State Department of Energy I noted:

Ideally, there should be two major energy entities: (Possibly a third if a Power Authority is created but that might wish to integrate this entire Energy Department concept as well.)

1) The Department of Public utility Control that would deal specifically with regulated electric and gas utilities; and

2) This new Department of Energy would handle general coordination of policy and oversee all other energy functions not under the purview of the DPUC. [Emphasis added.]

I suggest the Committee look at New York as a workable model that may fit into this design. They have a mature organization called the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). It was formed in the 1970's and while it has also gone through some growing pains, it today stands as a model of competence that bring much of the energy-related infrastructure under one umbrella. I have had the opportunity to work closely with several members of that organization over the years and found them to be knowledgeable, thoughtful professionals.

I was extremely enthusiastic when in 2011 the administration created legislation for such a department. It made sense to combine it with at least portions of the Dept. of Environmental Protection since energy and air (and water) quality are inextricably linked and some savings could be realized. While at the time I did have some difficulty with sections in SB1 and SB 1243 that combined the DPUC into it, I chose not to comment in my official testimony. Now, I wish to go on the record to say I think we need to reconsider the inclusion of the DPUC (now PURA) into DEEP. I was extremely clear in my 2006 testimony (point 2 above) that I expected such a separation and this bill offers me the opportunity to actively support that.

As it is currently, I see a loss of total independence of this quasi-judicial function and a loss of a certain "tension" with policy-makers that is required to vet complex information in an open, transparent and participatory process that has evolved --and still needs to evolve further. In my simplistic way of thinking about it, what was done is akin to placing the courts within the executive branch. While I have seen some less than optimal decisions over the years, to lessen PURA's independence, including being under DEEP for administrative purposes only, and authority in the name of expediency or even cost-savings may not be in the best interest of the ratepayers. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

38 Brookmoor Rd. West Hartford, CT 06107
(860) 561-0566

Energy Agency Needs Separate Identity

To the Editor:

While I do believe the reorganization of the state agencies is a long overdue measure, I believe that more than a cursory process should accompany any actions to be taken.

I find it difficult to understand, at a time when it is increasingly apparent that energy is one of the most critical problems of our time, why the state's energy agency is being buried administratively for a second time. Instead of being maintained as a separate energy department (as I believe it should be) it is proposed to be consolidated within the proposed Office of Policy and Management. I firmly support its existence in the present form. To lose it now would be taking a large step backwards.

Joel N. Gordes

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