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Testimony of Shirley Bergert¹

**Before the Government Administration And Elections Committee
Regarding H.B. #5027 Section 46 (Low Income Energy Advisory Board)**

**An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning The
Elimination, Consolidation And Modification Of Various Boards And**

Commissions

March 2, 2012

Recommended actions regarding Section 46:

1. **Reject modification to subsection (d) which removes critical minimal logistical support by OPM for the Low Income Energy Advisory Board's operation.**
2. **Support other suggested technical modifications.**

We recommend rejecting modification to subsection (d) of Section 46 of this bill which removes critical logistical support for the Low Income Energy Advisory Board (LIEAB). These minimal supports provided by OPM are critical to LIEAB's functioning. LIEAB is a state board mandated by statute (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 16a-41b). With the exception of administration representatives, its hardworking and knowledgeable participants serve at no cost to the state, meeting on a monthly basis with committees meeting at other times. The board is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requirements regarding notice of meetings, minutes, open meetings and public availability of documents. It does not have the needed support to maintain operations and meet FOIA requirements without assistance from the administration.

LIEAB is charged with advising OPM, DSS, DEEP and the legislature regarding "affordable access to residential energy services" by "low-income state residents." The following are activities the board undertakes:

- helps develop the annual US HHS funded energy assistance plan, analyzing proposals and program administration, and tracking progress throughout the heating season;

¹ Connecticut Legal Services serves low income households in Connecticut, providing legal advice and assistance in civil matters, including access to affordable energy services. Shirley Bergert serves on the Low Income Energy Advisory Board, Energy Conservation Management Board, Fuel Oil Conservation Board, and the Advisory Board for the Institute for Sustainable Energy.

- tracks utility administered payment programs and conservation assistance, working with the utilities to improve such programs and ensure coordination with the energy assistance program;
- tracks Operation Fuel assistance and other assistance that may be available to help ensure low income households have access to essential services;
- serves as the federally mandated review panel for the US DOE funded weatherization program administered by the community action agencies;
- develops analysis and proposals for consideration by the administration and legislature (*e.g.*, low income utility rate); and
- advises the legislature and DEEP regarding the above.

LIEAB serves a valuable function within state government. The minimal supports needed for its operation should be maintained.

Other technical modifications of the LIEAB statute provide clarity regarding the board's operation and should be supported.