

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNORS' HB NOS. 6353 & 6354**

March 22, 2013

***Statement of Patricia Stankevicius, Commissioner
State Elections Enforcement Commission***

I am writing to adamantly oppose the passage of the Governor's proposed bills 6353 & 6354. The Governor's proposal strips the elections agency of its budgetary independence and splits the SEEC apart, effectively destroying SEEC's ability to administer the public financing program. The proposal separates the compliance attorneys, enforcements attorneys, elections officers, disclosure and IT staff and investigators, all of whom are necessary to *work together* to provide customer service to the public and to campaigns, and to award CEP grants to qualifying candidates. I have serious doubts as to how the agency will be able to function when it is taken apart like this.

Without a full complement of CEP staff, the SEEC will simply be unable to provide timely compliance advice or fulfill our statutory mandate to award CEP grants to qualified candidates. The agency gives out a tremendous amount of advice, handling over 7,000 calls in 2011 and 11,000 calls in 2012. These ranged from simple, single issue requests to multi-question calls that required the involvement of staff attorneys, IT staff and elections officers, all working together. And they do their jobs well. Our surveys of candidates and treasurers indicate that 100% of candidates reported our answers were timely, as did 96% of treasurers. Also, 89% of candidates & 86% of treasurers gave the agency high marks for overall satisfaction with our administration of the CEP.

What other state government agency gets such high marks? And this was after we suffered a 40% cut in budget and staff less than two years ago. How can the agency be expected to do its job when its being torn apart? And what good would a watchdog agency be if the governor's office could strip it of resources—budget and personnel—whenever it felt threatened? These proposals would result in the destruction of a good, functioning agency, for little savings if any at all, and ultimately shatter the public's trust in the electoral process.

Thank you for your consideration of the Elections Enforcement Commission's views on these bills.