



Appropriations Committee Hearing
February 20, 2013

General Government – Office of Governmental Accountability

**Maintaining the Independence of the Freedom of Information Commission,
State Elections Enforcement Commission and Office of State Ethics**

Comments submitted by Christine Horrigan, Government Director

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a nonpartisan, statewide organization committed to effective public policy and active involvement of citizens in their government. As you consider the Governor's Budget, the League urges you to *provide adequate funding for the Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC), the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) and the Office of State Ethics (OSE) and to reject those aspects of the Governor's Budget which would transfer legal staff from the divisions of the Office of Governmental Accountability (OGA) to a newly created Office of Hearings within the OGA.*

The League believes that the public should have confidence in the integrity of its government. To accomplish this end, we *support measures to ensure the existence of strong, effective, independent watchdog agencies* such as the Office of State Ethics, the Freedom of Information Commission and the State Elections Enforcement Commission. In addition, we support the allocation of resources necessary for these commissions to fulfill their responsibilities.

In order to garner the public's confidence, watchdog agencies must be protected from political pressure, free from conflicts of interest and immune to outside influences. The Governor's Budget proposes transferring the legal staff of the SEEC, FOIC and OSE to a new Office of Hearings within the OGA. This newly created division would investigate and prosecute complaints and provide advisory opinions and staff assistance to the SEEC, OSE and FOIC. Investigations of ethics, election-related and freedom of information complaints would no longer be conducted by independent watchdog agencies, but instead would fall under the auspices of the executive administrator of the OGA, who reports directly to the Governor and who would have the power to hire and fire legal staff. If implemented as proposed, the potential for conflicts of interests, political pressure and undue influence would be real and significant.

In 2011, the League opposed the creation of the Office of Governmental Accountability on the grounds that it would compromise the authority, effectiveness and independence of the watchdog agencies. This new consolidation of the legal and enforcement functions of the watchdog agencies will only serve to further weaken the SEEC, FOIC and OSE and to erode the public's trust in its government. There is a very disturbing trend at work here. If the consolidation is allowed to go forward as proposed, it appears to be only a matter of time before the critical oversight provided by these agencies will be gone or so weakened as to be nearly meaningless.

We understand that in this difficult economic climate streamlining agencies across the board and meeting consolidation targets is appealing. *However, we cannot allow false economy to compromise the important work that these independent agencies are doing for our democracy.* We urge you (1) to reject the Governor's plan to consolidate the legal staff of the watchdog agencies within a newly created Office of Hearings and (2) to make adjustments to the budget as necessary and appropriate to guarantee that the SEEC, FOIC and OSE have adequate resources to fulfill their responsibilities to the public.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.



Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
775 Bloomfield Ave., Windsor, CT 06095-2322
(860) 768-1100 • Fax (860) 768-1108 • www.cfba.org

February 20, 2013

Testimony in Support of: HB 6350 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2015, AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATING TO REVENUE.

and in opposition to HB 6357 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION.

Submitted by: Henry N. Talmage, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.

Senator Harp, Representative Walker members of the Committee,

The Connecticut Farm Bureau is in general support of the Governor's Budget proposal for the Department of Agriculture and the CT Agricultural Experiment Station. We recognize that the difficult budget climate continues to necessitate very strict and efficient utilization of scarce resources. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the budget the Connecticut Farm Bureau urges that the Commissioner of Agriculture and the Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station will be given authority to use budgeted funds to fill critical vacant positions that are important to safety and agricultural support.

The Connecticut Farm Bureau opposes the provision contained in HB 6357, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION that would transfer funding for the Healthy Foods Initiative of the Department of Education from the General Fund to the Community Investment Act fund.

The Community Investment Act provides funding for the Agricultural Sustainability Account, Agricultural Viability Grant Program, Farm Transition Program, CT Grown program, Farm Link program, Seafood Advisory Council, CT Farm Wine Development Council, the Food Policy Council and the Farmland Preservation Program.

The Healthy Food Initiative is a worthwhile project that has been instrumental in improving the quality of foods served in our schools by providing a Healthy Food Certification Program and 10 cents per meal reimbursement for participating schools that serve healthier foods. CT Farm Bureau is in full support of the program and we in no way advocate for its elimination. However, we strongly object to utilizing the Community Investment Act (CIA) as the source of funding for the program.

In 2005 a coalition of groups representing agriculture, open space, historic preservation and affordable housing worked with the Legislature to pass the Community Investment Act. Right from the beginning it was recognized that the Community Investment Act was an innovative way to provide funding for land-based and real estate related projects that was tied to activity to the real estate market itself. The funding that has been generated through the recording fees authorized through the Community Investment Act has provided a means to protect and promote each of these critical areas of importance for the residents of Connecticut in a very efficient and logical manner.

To permanently divert \$4,000,000 per year to fund the Healthy Food Initiative of the approximately \$21,000,000 that the CIA brings in annually will have a profound negative effect on the ability to continue the great work of the Community Investment Act. It is extremely important not to allow the Community Investment Act to become a source of funding for programs and projects unrelated to its original intent. If this is allowed to happen CIA will simply become a mechanism to shift costs away from the general fund.

The Connecticut Farm Bureau urges the Committee to recommend the Healthy Foods Initiative funding be removed from the Community Investment Act and restored to the General Fund.

Connecticut Farm Bureau Association - *The Voice of Connecticut Agriculture*