

General Government A, Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 2:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Budget Hearing Testimony - Office of Governmental Accountability

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for considering my comments regarding the budget of the Office of Governmental Accountability (OGA). As the first and only previous person to occupy an education/communications position in the Office of State Ethics (OSE), I can specifically and expertly address the proposal to move the OSE's communications position to the OGA umbrella.

It is a good and fair idea for such a high-level position to be shared among all of the watchdogs, none of which have such a post, even though they may serve much larger constituencies with far more intricate laws.

Past and recent history demonstrate that such a full-time post is not necessary in the ethics agency alone. The preceding State Ethics Commission operated for decades without such a position, and it was not among the posts recommended by Mitch Pearlman as the new agency formed in 2005. In fact, OSE Director Carol Carson, in 2011, suggested to me that the position would either have to go to 19 hours per week (non-benefit) or be pulled up to the OGA umbrella office. DAS and OPM red-circled the position upon my departure (voluntary, in good standing, to be home with my children) and declined to open or fill it until the Legislature created the unique new post last session. (It is relevant to note that the new post was filled through a closed, back-door process, in which no qualified SEBAC candidates were allowed to compete. That is certainly not befitting of an agency committed to transparency.)

The assertion in the media that a full-time communications post is necessary to the functioning of the agency is new and is at odds with actual experience. I know this, as I occupied the position in a part-time capacity from 2007-2011. In that time, all of the agency's statutory responsibilities were met, our RBA data showed measurable success in the education and communications arenas, press and public communications were constant, and measurable progress was noted in each annual report. I set up self-sustaining education systems including a training DVD and web-streaming video, an online training module available through the OSE's website and state LMS, and a "cascade training" program through which each state agency's ethics liaison is trained to train their own agency personnel in turn. Further, during this time period, I was absent for two full maternity leave periods, equaling 12-13 months combined in which the General Counsel and Legal Division (they hold statutory responsibility for education) expertly handled training.

Rather than proving a substantial increase of service, the new post has given the OSE time to conduct employee personality assessments during the work day and to hold day-long, off-site strategy retreats.

I apologize that I am out of state this week and thus unable to appear before you in person. I am available at any time throughout the session should you wish to discuss this with me in more detail. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Meredith A. Trimble
Former Director of Education, Connecticut Office of State Ethics

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