



Testimony of
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Before the
Appropriations Committee
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**Regarding HB 6353 AAC State Budget Reform
HB 6354 AA Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations
Concerning General Government**

Good morning Senator Harp and Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Cheri Quickmire and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut.

Common Cause in Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has worked for four decades in Connecticut and worked with the General Assembly and many governors to pass strong freedom of information laws, election reforms that open up our electoral system to broader participation; campaign finance and disclosure reforms, and common sense ethics reforms. We have more than 400,000 members around the country and 35 state chapters. We have approximately 7500 members and activists in Connecticut.

**I am here to testify in opposition to HB 6353 AAC State Budget Reform
HB 6354 AA Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations
Concerning General Government**

HB 6353 AAC State Budget Reform takes away budgeting authority of the State Elections Enforcement Commission, the State Ethics Commission and the Freedom of Information Commission as well as those of the other agencies currently housed in the Office of Government Accountability, allowing the Governor to unilaterally cut their proposed budgets before it is passed on to the legislature where it was clear that budgeting authority was to remain with the individual agencies. This is contrary the intent of the General Assembly in

agreeing to name the OGA which was that the Governor would accept the budgets as proposed –thus protecting the SEEC and others from retaliation for enforcement and other activities.

HB 6354 AA Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning General Government essentially divides the SEEC into three units, removes additional staff and virtually ensures that future election grant making and enforcement will be compromised. In addition, enforcement and advisory functions of OSE, FOIC and SEEC would be shared by the same attorneys – all responsible for enforcement, advice, campaign finance and other election matters. This was unworkable when it was first recommended and is even worse now with fewer staff and resources.

Governor Malloy's Budget Plans Eviscerate Watchdogs' Independence

We need strong, independent watchdog agencies to enforce any laws that the legislature passes. Governor Malloy's latest plan to once again try to consolidate the watchdog agencies will eliminate their independence and make them accountable to him and undermines the integrity of all the work those agencies do. His plan to grab ten attorneys from the State Elections Enforcement Commission, the Office of State Ethics, and Freedom of Information Commission to create a new Office of Hearings that will be accountable to the Governor's appointee, David Guay – will weaken those agencies ability to do the work they need to investigate problems that crop up. In addition, the governor plans to remove 5 IT people, 2 fiscal staff and 3 investigators from elections enforcement, making it impossible for them to make grants for the Citizens Election program.

Two years ago, Governor Malloy proposed consolidation to supposedly save money. This proposal doesn't even save money – it simply eviscerates these agencies. The budget he submitted violates state law that was put in place to protect the watchdogs from a governor who may want to retaliate against these agencies for investigations, or other actions. Senate President Don Williams, Speaker Brendan Sharkey and members of this General Assembly cannot allow this to happen. Governor Malloy's plans make a complete mockery of all the work we have done over decades to put some of the strongest campaign finance, freedom of information and ethics reforms in the country in place here. ***Without independent watchdogs, Connecticut reform laws aren't worth the paper they are printed on.***

As has been reported repeatedly since the scandals of the Rowland administration, Connecticut's reputation as "Corrupticut" was well deserved. Many members of this General Assembly and subsequent administrations worked very hard to earn praise for government transparency and accountability largely through its watchdog agencies. Connecticut's reforms moved our state far beyond Rowland's administration's criminal enterprise as described in the Hartford Courant¹. We are certainly not suggesting subsequent administrations are engaged in wrongdoing, but the watchdog agencies are independent so that all of us – the public, the General Assembly, and the media can be confident that investigations and action taken by those agencies are not unduly influenced by the Governor – or any future governor, for that matter.

We need to be clear about the fact that this proposal does not save the state money and that it takes away something priceless – the independence of the

watchdogs. The public should never need to question the integrity of a watchdog decision. If this proposal is enacted they will because watchdog decisions may be subject to political pressure. We are hopeful that we can quickly move beyond this deeply flawed proposal, so that we can tackle the very real problems we face in Connecticut – including problems that undermine our Citizens' Election program and the transparency of our electoral process.

Common Cause has been working to improve transparency and accountability in state and federal government for more than forty years and we are happy to join with members of the newly-formed group **Connecticut Advocates for Accountable Government** to address these dangerous proposals. I would like to thank the committee for addressing the critically important issues of integrity and accountability in government as detailed in this budget proposal.

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ⁱ 'Corrupticut' No More? Hartford Courant, 19 March 2012.