

Statement of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information in Support of
House Bill 6566, An Act Concerning Transparency in Economic Assistance Programs

Monday, March 11, 2013

Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

My name is Claude Albert. I am the legislative chair of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information. We are an organization that has been committed for more than 50 years to furthering government transparency and accountability. We support House Bill 6566 as an exceptional example of both.

In recent years the state government has made substantial investments of taxpayer money in private, for-profit enterprises in the form of grants, loans and foregone tax revenue. The ultimate purpose of these incentives is to improve the economy and quality of life for Connecticut citizens. These citizens have every right to expect a clear and strict accounting of whether their investments result in the community benefits intended. They deserve the opportunity to decide whether the deals entered into on their behalf are prudent, negotiated at arms length and carefully monitored.

This proposal would make critical elements of that accountability easily accessible. Citizens would know what businesses they are betting on, and they could compare anticipated benefits to actual results in jobs and economic vitality created.

In addition, the website that Comptroller Kevin Lembo is proposing as the vehicle for this information is the kind of public-service tool that every state agency should be working to provide. Too often the information needed to evaluate public policy is buried away, scattered or made difficult to access. This easy-to-use tool would empower citizens. It embraces the idea that transparency inspires public confidence and makes government better. What argument could outweigh the value of providing this kind of access and clarity, unless government leaders decide that citizens are better off in the dark?

We at CCFOI applaud Comptroller Lembo for taking this initiative on behalf of open government. We commend it to the legislature and to other government leaders as an example of what can be done when giving citizens easy access to information they need is made a priority.