



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

March 11, 2013

Statement of Carol Carson, Executive Director, Office of State Ethics

Senate Bill 900 – AAC Revisions to the State Codes of Ethics

Good morning, Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Ranking Members Senator McLachlan and Representative Hwang, and distinguished Committee members. For the record, I am Carol Carson, Executive Director of the Office of State Ethics. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony concerning Senate Bill 900, which is the Office of State Ethics proposal that is on the Committee's agenda today.

Senate Bill 900 is our Priority 1 legislation for the 2013 legislative session and I want to thank the Committee for raising this bill. The primary purpose of this legislation is to make critical and necessary revisions to the Codes of Ethics.

In sum, the bill expands the "gifts to the state" exception to the prohibition on gifts by including participation of public officials and state employees at an event that facilitates state or quasi-public agency action or functions. The proposed language was previously used in the "gifts to the state" exception, but was removed during the 2007 legislative session out of concern that donors may target specific officials and employees. A number of state agencies have indicated that such outright prohibition on gifts to the state to support participation of public officials and state employees at events eliminates cost-effective opportunities for state agencies to train and improve the skills of their workforces. Such participation must facilitate state action or functions.

The bill also amends the terms for Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board ("CEAB") members to expand the pool of qualified candidates and to stagger terms to ensure a quorum of the CEAB; and eliminates duplicative filing requirements and makes technical changes for consistency and clarification.

The bill would permit the Office of State Ethics to recover the amount of any financial benefit received by a state contractor for certain violations. It would give the office the authority to interpret Parts III and IV of chapter 10 of the general statutes and it would exempt the office from certain court fee requirements.

The bill also makes other changes to the codes of ethics including adding the term "intentionally" to the provision that prohibits public officials and employees from counseling, authorizing or sanctioning action that violates the Code of Ethics. It would require Public Utilities Regulatory Authority directors to file Statements of Financial Interests and eliminate the filing of a similar report with the Secretary of the State.

Finally, the bill also makes a number of minor clarifications such as extending the May 1 filing deadline for Statements of Financial Interests to the next business day in cases where May 1 falls on a weekend or holiday, and making consistent the February 15 deadline for filing an Annual Report with the Governor.

Thank you for your consideration of our agency proposal.