LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.

CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 25, 2013 Public Hearing

Comments Submitted by Pat Reilly, Connecticut League of Women Voters, Ethics Specialist

Comments On:

SB 1148 AA REDEFINING "MEETING" FOR PURPOSES OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

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The League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a nonpartisan statewide organization,, is a strong advocate of the principle that a democratic form of government depends upon informed and active participation by citizens and requires governmental bodies to protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, by holding open meetings, and by making public records accessible. This principle is grounded in legislation provided by the Federal and Connecticut Freedom of Information Acts.

For the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act, SB 1148 changes the definition of meetings to exclude "negotiations between members of different political parties who are in a leadership position, with respect to proposed legislation or a proposed action of the public agency to which such members belong, notwithstanding that such members also constitute a quorum of a public agency."

The League seeks clarification on the intent of the exemption. Because the subject matter of the negotiations is not specified, we are concerned the bill may violate the spirit of the CT Freedom of Information Act and may present a significant challenge to open government. Notices, agendas, minutes and records for these meetings would not be required.

The FOI Act defines an "Executive Session" as a meeting of a public agency at which the public is excluded for one or more of five purposes. If these five reasons do not fit the purpose of SB 1148, the public may be better served by an additional reason for an Executive Session (FOIA Section 1-200 (6)) rather than an additional exclusion to the definition of "Meeting" (FOIA Section 1-200 (2)). It is our understanding that while minutes and records are not taken for Executive Sessions, the public is informed about the occurrence of a session and the reason for it.

On behalf of the League, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 1148.

Written 3/25/13

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