



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

March 10, 2014

**Statement of Charles F. Chiusano, Chairman
Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board, Office of State Ethics**

H.B. No. 5481– An Act Establishing the Central Office of Administrative Hearings

My name is Charles Chiusano, and I am the Chairman of the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board of the Office of State Ethics. I am providing testimony on *House Bill 5481, An Act Establishing the Central Office of Administrative Hearings*, which proposes to establish an office within the Office of Governmental Accountability to hear contested cases concerning a number of state agencies, including the Office of State Ethics.

The Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board and the Office of State Ethics **strongly oppose** House Bill 5481.

In 2005, the General Assembly reformed state ethics laws to ensure that state governmental ethics oversight is grounded in an independent, non-partisan office supervised by a cross section of Connecticut citizens who comprise the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board. The Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board is a nine-member Board, and the members are appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders for staggered, non-renewable, four-year terms. The Board is responsible for issuing advisory opinions, making findings of violation of the Codes of Ethics, and issuing final decisions in enforcement matters.

The bill assails the independence of the Office of State Ethics and guts the essential responsibilities of the Board, in particular, the deliberative process of a multi-member body charged with disposing contested matters. According to the bill, the central office of administrative hearings will be headed by the Chief Administrative Law Judge who is nominated and removed by the Governor. By placing contested matters of the Office of State Ethics under the oversight of someone who answers to the Governor only, the bill creates an environment where the independence and non-partisanship of ethics matters will always be questioned.

The bill represents yet another attempt, among many in recent years, at the removal of the three pillars of ethics oversight in state government – independence, enforcement authority and adequate resources – from the Office of State Ethics. I ask you not to undermine the operations and accomplishments of the Office of State Ethics and the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board but maintain their independence, enforcement authority and resources.

Thank you for your consideration of the views of the Office of State Ethics and the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board.