

TESTIMONY OF DENNIS O'CONNOR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JUDICIAL REVIEW COUNCIL

I am the Executive Director of the Judicial Review Council. I offer this testimony in the hope of providing you, the members of the Appropriations Committee, with the answers to the eight standard Accountability questions for our program.

QUALITY OF LIFE RESULT TO WHICH JRC CONTRIBUTES

The Judicial Review Council received its power from the statutory scheme set forth in C.G.S. 51-51k et.seq. Its purpose is to help enforce high standards of judicial conduct on and off the bench in order to preserve the integrity of the court system and promote public confidence in courts. It is recognized that judges, family support magistrates and worker's compensation commissioners must be free to exercise their discretion without fear of disciplinary proceedings. However, they also must be held accountable for misconduct.

HOW DOES JRC CONTRIBUTE TO THE RESULT

The Judicial Review Council has been charged by the General Assembly with fairly and honestly examining complaints submitted by anyone-by litigant, pro se litigant, a relative of a litigant, an attorney, a citizen or even the Judicial Review Council itself. The goal of that adherence to the statutory process is to come to a just result, based upon the facts and the law (as found in the Code of Judicial Conduct and the relevant statutes.), without unnecessary delay.

JRC's "MAJOR " CONTACTS AS A RESULT OF ITS DECISIONS

Those aforementioned complainants, coming from various walks of life, are affected by the Judicial Review Council's decisions, as are the respondents- the judges, family support magistrates and workers' compensation commissioners alleged to have engaged in misconduct. The Judicial Review Council also affects other consumers of the judicial process who follow the complainant's trek

through the process. Finally, the citizens of the State, who serve as witnesses, as jurors, etc., will be affected by public confidence in the courts.

DELIVERY OF SERVICES

The Judicial Review Council is comprised of twelve regular members and a number of alternates. The regular members include three judges, three attorneys and six public members. The Council meets once a month to consider the complaints received. The Council staff consists of a part-time Executive Director, who is an attorney not engaged in the private practice of law, and a full-time Administrative Assistant. The complaint process is marked by deadlines- from the opening of the file to its disposition, as set forth in C.G.S.51-51I. The legislature has also required that **confidentiality of the investigation remain intact** until the Council, having determined that no misconduct occurred, dismisses the complaint, or until there is a public hearing on the complaint.

The result of the Council's work is the collection of data which must be shared in various ways. First, there is the preparation of the Annual Report, which is due on September 1st of each year, containing the Fiscal Year data that ended on June 30th (two months before). The Annual Report data does not lead to the identities of the complainants and respondents.

In addition, the Council is statutorily mandated to share the complaint histories of judges who are seeking nomination for reappointment, for elevation to the Appellate or Supreme Courts, with the Judicial Selection Commission, with investigators acting on the behalf of the Governor, and with investigators acting on the behalf of the Judiciary Committee. The data in question stretches over **eight years**.

Due to a vacancy that existed in the Administrative Assistant position, those tasks were basically accomplished by 19th century means- hand checking eight year's worth of files. I had to do it. The Chairman of the Council, Attorney Richard Meehan, Executive Administrator Shelby Brown of the Office of Governmental Accountability and I have had discussions regarding a computer program which can assist us in efficiently compiling and disseminating data to those who require it, and , I am told, for a relatively low cost. Scanning of complaint files going back

into the 1990's can be done for a reasonable cost and while still being in compliance with the State's records retention statutes.

These topics will allow us to work more efficiently. The Council's requirements regarding reports to the various parts of government won't change. The last four Annual Reports show a slowly escalating number of complaints received. It is my "vision" that reasonable technological (low cost) means will result in savings- in my cutting back my hours (a saving) so that a full time administrative assistant can accumulate and distribute the data (for nearly \$20.00 an hour less than me) electronically.

I hope I have touched upon your areas of interest and can answer your questions.