

Transportation Committee
February 23, 2015
H.B. No. 6821-Support

Good afternoon Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Michael J. P. Lajoie and I am a Transportation Engineer 2 with the Department of Transportation.

I submit this testimony in support of H.B. No. 6821. While this bill ultimately should be passed there are concerns with the language that we would like to see corrected. The bill as written allows the commissioner to utilize consultants to perform design work if he determines that the department lacks the technical expertise required to perform the design of a project designated to be constructed by a construction-manager-at-risk. The decline in the Department expertise is related to the use of consultants. The language of this bill will further the decline of this technical expertise within the Department. In 5 to 7 years, the most senior people with the most technical expertise will retire, and with it the Department's institutional memory will be lost. To increase the use of consultants will further exacerbate the problem.

Within the Bridge Design unit, I sometimes review working drawings and calculations from consulting engineering firms. I usually spend more time correcting these submittals than if I was to design the structure myself. I had a project for a noise barrier wall in East Hartford that were Design/Build, the Contractor had to provide 3 submittals of working drawings by a consultant engineer, they submittals were so flawed they had to provide 12 submittals before they were approved. I have seen projects prepared by consultants, using details I prepared, the only difference is that my initials were removed and replaced by those of engineer working for the consulting engineering firm. They receive a fee as if they created the design from scratch. On another project, a consultant was given a project to paint a bridge. Bridge Design was asked to provide details to the consultant from a previous project for the consultant to use as a guideline. These details were from an old project, The Department was using a different painting procedure, and it was the consultant's responsibility to update the painting procedure. The consulting engineering firm replicated this old project instead of updating the design. Some engineers in Bridge Design disparagingly referred to this as 'Copy Design'.

Many engineers in upper management do not technical expertise, so they cannot appreciate what we do. They believe we slow the project delivery process when we find additional issues and flaws in the design process. The schedule is sometimes more important than public safety.

I have long complained about the lack of projects with greater complexity so we can develop greater technical expertise. I had one Principle Engineer tell me in a Bridge Design staff meeting, that he did not want to hear anymore about my “sexy” bridge. Even though he was Principle Engineer of Bridge Design, he had never designed a bridge or even worked in the Bridge Design Unit. He possessed only a two year college degree.

For the record, the last 3 Principle Engineers never designed a bridge or even worked in the Bridge Design unit.

There is a disdain for engineers with technical expertise. What is valued is the administrative and bureaucratic expertise or in other words, paper pushing. I was told by Engineering Administrator, Scott Hill when he was the Bridge Manager, that he did not need design engineers but project managers.

The use of consulting engineering firms is so insidious; we hire consultants to oversee other consulting engineering firms. Those persons in upper management advocating the use of consulting engineers will be long gone before the short sightedness of this policy is discovered. Most likely they will be working for these consulting engineering firms.

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