

## Testimony of Patrick Sheehan

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of Raised Bill 104, an act establishing a State Civic Network for Connecticut. Since 2001, I have served as chairman of the Connecticut Public Affairs Network – leading a Board of Directors drawn from journalism, academia, business, and public-service, ALL committed to promoting greater understanding of our state government by opening the doors to the proceedings that affect us all. A pool-feed for the media. An archive for the State. CPAN was established in the late 1990s for the express purpose of increasing citizen engagement in our democracy.

Before my fifteen years in this volunteer role, I spent 35 years as a working journalist – covering state government since the Dempsey administration. I have witnessed the growth of State government, State services, and the State’s importance in our lives. At the same time, I have watched the changing role of the media – in fact, I have lived it: as the audience for television grew, and newspaper circulation fell. As 99 cable channels shattered the dominance of just five local signals in our state. And today, as digital platforms have further splintered the audience – that IS the Connecticut electorate.

I have enormous respect and affection for the Capitol press corps, but recognize how challenging it is to compete for resources and airtime in a saturated media environment where crime, fires, and the weather dominate – and government news is often considered too difficult to cover and explain. I am incredibly grateful for the emergence of new alternative news services, as well as the persistence of those in the legacy media who fight for space and airtime – to present important stories.

CT-N was founded...to offer citizens a place to directly access and understand the meaningful activities of our State. It was never intended to be a service OF government, but rather ABOUT government – as are the national and municipal services that welcome citizens to unbiased channels that provide access and context. Technology now allows the coverage of all government activities, archived and searchable files, and presentations that appeal not-only to government insiders, but to the general public as well.

In the early days, the cable providers in Connecticut rejected appeals to fund and carry a channel for government programming – as they had in Washington DC and Pennsylvania. The General Assembly stepped-in to launch and finance CT-N, managed by our non-partisan, independent 501c3. For 17 years, the taxpayers have funded the operation – as technology raced forward, and the need grew greater. CTN also, in that time, has proven to be a reliable and valuable tool for citizen engagement, no longer a novelty, but an expectation in the public square.

Raised Bill 104 provides a funding system supported by cable providers, a regulated structure for management selection, with advisory oversight by the three branches of State government. The designation of CTN as a State Civic Network deserves your support.

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