

Testimony of Colleen M. Murphy, Executive Director and General Counsel  
Freedom of Information Commission  
Before the Appropriations Committee  
February 19, 2016

Regarding HB 5044 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures For the Fiscal Year  
Ending June 30, 2017.

Thank you, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Committee, for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Governor's Proposed Budget Adjustments for Fiscal Year 2017, as set forth in House Bill 5044. The Freedom of Information Commission ("Commission" or "FOIC") realizes that the state is experiencing a financial emergency and that changes must be made at all levels of state government. Toward that end, and although it has statutory budgetary autonomy, the Commission has consistently offered budgetary reductions when asked to do so.

The Commission is the public's overseer of state and local government; its core services are as follows: the resolution of citizen complaints filed regarding the withholding of public records and the exclusion of the public from open meetings, either through mediation or adjudication; the education of public officials and employees about their statutory duties under the Freedom of Information Act; and the litigation of appeals taken from decisions concerning access to public records and meetings, at all levels of court.

The Commission's case docket has increased dramatically over the past several years, while its staff and funding have been greatly reduced due to consolidation and budget cuts. Nevertheless, the Commission is committed to carrying out its mission during these difficult financial times, in the most cost-effective manner; and I am actively seeking ways to fulfill the Commission's responsibilities, without abridging the right of the citizens of Connecticut to open and accountable government.

Rest assured that the FOIC remains committed to doing its part to help ease the state's current fiscal crisis. That said however, the cuts proposed in the Governor's budget are grave. The Commission looks forward to meeting with the General Government A subcommittee and reviewing in detail the effect of the proposed cuts on the Commission's ability to carry out its core services. It is our hope that the FOIC can further help achieve savings without sacrificing the vital role the Commission plays in fostering the people's trust in the government that represents them.