



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## OFFICE OF POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

### **TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE** *March 11, 2016*

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Testimony Regarding Senate Bill No. 331, Senate Bill No. 420, Senate Bill No. 421, Senate Bill No. 425, House Bill No. 5601, House Bill No. 5602, House Bill No. 5603, and House Bill No. 5604

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Senator Osten, Representative Miller and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony regarding the following bills:

**Senate Bill 331 An Act Establishing a High-Speed Internet Service Pilot Program.** This bill appropriates \$20 million from the general fund to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to establish a high speed internet service pilot program. *OPM opposes this bill* because the pilot program was not included in the Governor's proposed budget and the general fund is not able to support a program of this magnitude at this time. The bill would also require OPM to expend valuable and limited staffing resources at a time when OPM is working to identify and preserve its core functions.

**Senate Bill 420 An Act Establishing a Pilot Program to Identify Residents with Unmet Needs Based on Unpaid Water Bills.** This bill would require the OPM to establish a pilot program that would seek to identify residents who have had their service discontinued at least once in the last twenty four months due to an unpaid bill or have an outstanding water utility bill of one hundred fifty dollars or more. Once the residents have been identified, the bill requires OPM to consider implementing a program that would address these residents' unmet needs and submit a report on its findings and recommendations. *OPM opposes this bill* because it requires OPM to gather information that is not available to it. Water companies are not permitted to share information regarding billing or other account information with anyone other than the customer of record. In addition to the obvious logistical issues in being required to gather information it doesn't have access to, this bill would again create additional responsibilities for OPM during a time of limited resources.

**Senate Bill 421 An Act Concerning Community Empowerment and the Neighborhood Assistance Act.** This bill would require OPM to create and maintain a website for residents and organizations to submit their proposals for solutions to urban area problems. It also requires OPM to establish a pilot program to implement the proposal if OPM determines that the proposal is viable. Once again, *this bill would increase responsibilities at OPM at a time when staff time and resources are severely limited.* Section 5 of the bill would establish a commission to (a) study the manner in which state funding is utilized by nonprofit providers, (b) review the requirements imposed on nonprofit providers and (c) evaluate nonprofit provider compliance with such requirements. The work of this task force would be duplicative of the work and analysis that has and continues to be done by the Governor's Cabinet on Nonprofit Health & Human Services. The cabinet is comprised of state agency health and human service agency commissioners and nonprofit provider representatives, and is charged with analyzing and making recommendations on issues related to nonprofit providers, including those outlined in the bill.

**Senate Bill 425 An Act Concerning Municipal Transparency, Efficiency and Accountability.** This bill would require OPM to award funding from the regional planning incentive account to up to 20 individual municipalities for the creation of a citizen relationship management system. There is nothing in current statute that prevents two or more municipalities from coming together to apply for funding through the Regional Planning Incentive Program (RPIP) for a citizen relationship management system through their Council of Governments. This bill would allow RPIP to fund municipalities in a way that undermines the purpose of RPIP, which is to encourage cooperation amongst municipalities, and reduce the funds available for other regionalization projects. It should also be noted that as a result of the budget agreement reached last legislative session, RPIP will not have funding deposited in the account in FY17.

**House Bill 5601 An Act Concerning the Connecticut Transportation Institute and a Study of School Transportation Efficiencies.** This bill allows OPM to pay for the study of school transportation efficiencies conducted by The Connecticut Transportation Institute through an RPIP grant. While the language pertaining to the funding of the study is permissive, we would like to point out that as a result of the budget agreement reached last legislative session, RPIP will not have funds deposited in the account in FY17. We would encourage the proponent of the bill to speak with the State Department of Education, which already has issued an RFP for a school transportation efficiency study in the Sheff region. In addition, groups of municipalities and councils of governments interested in obtaining efficiencies can do such studies on a regional basis. The subsequent savings would offset the cost of the studies.

**House Bill 5602 An Act Concerning Regionalism.** Section 7 requires RPIP funds to be distributed to the Auditors of Public Accounts in order to audit private providers of special education services. This would impose a significant fiscal impact on the RPIP fund at a time when funds will no longer be deposited in the RPIP account as a result of the budget agreement reached last legislative session. We believe this should be funded through the General Fund, as these funds would be used to pay for staff positions. Funding positions through RPIP is not consistent with the intent of the program and also raises concerns over which entity would ultimately be responsible for fringe benefit costs.

**House Bill 5603 An Act Concerning Regional Technology.** Section 5 of this bill requires the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to publish on its website a list of state technology contracts. DAS already publishes all contracts on the state contracting portal, which is available to the public.

**House Bill 5604 An Act Concerning Regional Efficiencies.** This bill requires OPM to implement a regional efficiency tool developed by the MORE Commission and to distribute funding based on that evaluation tool. The language is not clear on what kind of funding would be distributed based on the tool. For instance, the language does not indicate whether bond funding should also be based on these criteria. In addition to this uncertainty, the bill again requires more of OPM during a time of limited resources.

As a whole, while we may support the intent of many of these proposals, the vast majority of the bills referred to in this testimony would require OPM to take on additional responsibilities and require additional resources at the very time that the agency is determining how to reduce its tasks and responsibilities down to its core mission. In addition, RPIP grants will be significantly limited due to the elimination of funding for the RPIP account in FY17.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on these proposals. If you should require any additional information, please contact Acting Undersecretary David LeVasseur at david.levasseur@ct.gov.