Greetings Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Judith Rossi, the Executive Director of the Judicial Review Council. I offer this testimony to provide you accountability questions for our statutory agency.

QUALITY OF LIFE RESULTS TO WHICH JRC CONTRIBUTES

The Judicial Review Council receives 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. 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—a represented party, a pro se litigant, a relative of a litigant, an attorney, another judge, 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 complainants 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 by statute of twelve unpaid regular members and a number of alternates. All are appointed by the governor. The regular members include three judges, three attorneys and six public members. The Council meets once a month to consider the complaints received, and holds hearings when necessary. The Council's paid 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. 51-51l. The legislature has also required that confidentiality of the investigation remain intact unless and 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 reveal the identities of the complainants and respondents.

In addition, the Council is statutorily mandated to share the complaint histories of judges seeking nomination for reappointment or 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.

At this point, the JRC office contains paper files going back to the 1990’s, and we are running out of storage room. It is our plan for 2019-2020 to institute an office records retention/disposal policy, in accordance with the applicable state law. We would also like to explore whether, going forward, we can save all (or at least most) files electronically.

Our agency is also interested in exploring whether the 12 Judicial Review Council members, can be provided with state-owned secure laptops or tablets on which they can remotely receive files, transcripts and other information relevant to the resolution of complaints against judges. This would decrease paper and copying costs and mailing costs, a significantly large area of the Council’s budget.

I hope I have touched upon your areas of interest.