Appropriations Committee
March 8, 2019

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am testifying in support of appropriating the necessary funds to fill the approximate 450 vacancies at the Connecticut Department of Transportation, instead of using the available monies to hire private engineering consultants.

My name is Michael Chachakis and I work within the Department of Traffic Engineering within the Connecticut Department of Transportation, specifically the Project Design Unit. As a Traffic Engineer, I develop “in-house” designs as well as review projects designed by private Consultants. These projects involve roadway geometry, traffic control signals, signs, pavement markings, and the maintenance and protection of traffic during construction, among other design facets. I develop and review estimates and contracts for various construction projects, as well. I also follow projects into construction and support inspection personnel as needed. Basically, it is my responsibility to make sure that every motorist on Connecticut’s roadway network reaches their destination as safely and efficiently as possible. As you can imagine, almost every CTDOT project finds its way through Traffic Engineering.

During my ten year career as a Traffic Engineer at the CTDOT, I have found that, from a Traffic Engineering perspective, State engineers can complete designs more quickly and at a lower cost than their private Consultant counterparts.

As a reviewer, I will review the same Consultant designed project three to four times and easily attend just as many meetings. Almost every project is submitted for a Department wide review at the Preliminary (30%), Semi-Final (60%), and Final (90%) Design levels. Some projects even have a 100% design review. For each review, I provide comments on the proposed design. These comments are essentially mistakes, omissions, or other design faults. They could be anything from an incorrect lane or shoulder width to poor signal phasing and timing to incorrect use of traffic drums and cones. In less time than it takes to complete a single design review, an in-State Engineer could complete an entire design. Instead of searching for mistakes and marking up plans, contracts, or estimates, one could simply create their own. This is especially the case when review comments from previous submissions are not addressed or incorporated in the future submissions or when the State engineer has to provide a design or contract special provision for the Consultant. When any of this occurs, work is essentially being duplicated and the Consultant is getting paid for work that they did not perform. When private engineering firms are hired by the State they are basically paying the State engineer AND the private firm to develop the project, instead of only the State engineer.

Additionally, State employees do not work “for profit.” Even if salaries were equal, which they usually aren’t (State employee salaries are usually lower than their private consultant counterparts), private consultants have to negotiate payment for their work prior to the start of a project. Even this by itself is a labor-intensive process that is not necessary for in-house State designs. The negotiation process requires every engineering discipline involved in a project to develop a “man-hour estimate” that describes how much work they think the Consultant will need to do to complete the project for their specific discipline. The Consultant also submits their own estimate. Negotiations then follow. As you can imagine, this process can take a while. Conversely, a State employee working on an “in-house” design is avoiding these negotiations, is merely being paid their salary, and can simply just get to work. There isn’t any additional overhead. There isn’t any “acceptable profit.” There isn’t any arguing over “extra work” and if the project needs to re-scooped and renegotiated. The State employee is working “at cost,” so to speak. And no matter what happens with the project, this doesn’t change. Not the case with private consultants.

In the end, State employees have ample opportunity to save the State time and money when developing “in-house” designed projects. This also allows for a superior product. They are also accountable for their work. State engineers work for the public, not for the client that hired them. Not for shareholders, but for the taxpayers.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate the opportunity provided for me to testify on the behalf of State employees, both current and future.

Michael Chachakis