

Connecticut General Assembly



OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS

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January 9, 2014

Senator Beth Bye, Co-Chair
Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chair
Senator Robert Kane, Ranking Member
Representative Craig Miner, Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
Room 2600
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Sen. Bye, Rep. Walker, Sen. Kane, and Rep. Miner:

Under C.G.S. Section 2-53l, OFA is required to maintain an on-line searchable database of state expenditures and to annually report on the database to the Appropriations Committee including any recommendations for improvement.

This is the second annual status report for the on-line searchable database¹. The site, which is located at www.transparency.ct.gov² went live June 2011 with the inclusion of Fiscal Year 2010 data. The site now includes four years (FY 10 – FY 13) of expenditure data. In FY 13, the website had 163,835 visitors, an increase of 235% from the previous year, from over 100 countries.

¹PA 12-1 (JSS) modified the reporting requirement for the searchable database by making it an annual, rather than quarterly requirement, beginning on January 15, 2013. (See Appendix A)

²A link to the site is also provided on the OFA website homepage.

The database³ includes expenditures for all funds (appropriated and non-appropriated) including employee compensation, contracts, vendors, grants, and pensions. For FY 13, the data that is available on the transparency website includes total expenditures of \$35.3 billion. Some of the components are:

- \$19.0 billion in the General Fund (53.8% of the total);
- \$5.6 billion in cost for 91,597 individual employees⁴ associated with salary and fringe benefits (15.9% of the total);
- \$1.4 billion in pension payments (4.0% of the total); and
- \$24.5 billion for 348,985 vendor payments (69.4% of the total).

Changes from Last Report

Prior to FY 13, the information used to populate Transparency CT came from two sources: CORE CT and the State Comptroller's pension database. Information on vendor payments from the state's higher education units was not included since this information is contained in the respective legacy accounting systems of these agencies and is not available in CORE-CT.

In January 2013 we requested that UConn, the UConn Health Center and the Board of Regents for Higher Education provide vendor payment information electronically to us. UConn and the UConn Health Center were able to provide this information in time for our FY 13 update. We are hopeful that the remaining agency, the Board of Regents, will be able to provide this information in the future.

The website has also been expanded to include links to federal funding sources, OFA's Tax Expenditure Report, and the Assessment of Connecticut's Tax Credit and Abatement Programs. In addition, a pension information page was added to provide an overview of each of the state pension systems.

Site Rating

The U.S.PIRG annually publishes ratings of transparency sites. In 2012, after Transparency CT was developed, U.S.PIRG noted that the site was an "intuitive and user-friendly transparency website...the layout is understandable to an ordinary Connecticut citizen—visitors do not need to be tech-savvy budget experts to navigate the site"⁵ and gave the site a rating of "B." CT also obtained a rating of "B" from the Sunshine Review in 2013.⁶

³The primary source of information for the searchable database is the state's accounting system CORE-CT, which does not currently contain vendor payment information for the Board of Regents or UConn. Pension payment information is provided by the Office of the State Comptroller and is not available on CORE-CT.

⁴Individual employees include: full time, temporary, contractual, student laborers, part time and graduate assistants.

⁵<http://www.uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/Following%20the%20Money%20vUS%20WEB.pdf>

⁶http://sunshinereview.org/images/0/06/2013_Transparency_Report_Card.pdf

However, when U.S.PIRG rated state websites in 2013,⁷ CT had fallen to a C+. This drop is reflective of U.S.PIRG's emphasis on raising the bar for transparency as states become more proficient. In addition, since 2012, the Office of the State Comptroller developed the OPEN CT website⁸, which publishes an array of information including a link to Transparency CT.

When more than one transparency site exists, U.S.PIRG has decided to rate the more exhaustive site only since it believes that transparency information should be located in one place. In 2013, U.S.PIRG chose to rate OPEN CT as the primary state transparency site rather than Transparency CT and appears to be poised to do so again in 2014.

Recommendations

The Transparency CT site could be considered to be at a crossroads. Given the emphasis by U.S.PIRG on the need for one place to obtain data on government spending, the existence of two websites does not meet this goal. In addition, since the operation and maintenance of Transparency CT is not a core duty of OFA's mission, our focus has been on maintaining compliance with the statute rather than expanding into non-mandated areas.

It seems reasonable that in order to develop the best (or higher rated) transparency site, resources should be dedicated and expanded to developing the transparency site and one site/location should be specified for development. In addition, a governing board or oversight body would be helpful to assist in providing guidance.

Acknowledgements

As in past reports, I should note again that without the assistance and cooperation of the State Comptroller's staff, the staff of our CGA Information Technology Services office and that of UConn/UChc, the site would not be operational or as inclusive as it is.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Alan Calandro
Director

⁷http://uspirgedfund.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/USP_Following_the_Money_screen_final.pdf

⁸<http://www.osc.ct.gov/openCT/menu.html>

cc: Appropriations Committee Members
Timothy B. Kehoe, Senate Clerk
Garey E. Coleman, Senate Clerk
Martin J. Dunleavy, House Clerk
Ann M. Clark, House Clerk
Kendall F. Wiggin, State Librarian
Honorable Kevin Lembo, State Comptroller
Ken Greene, Office of Information Technology Services

Appendix A

Connecticut General Statutes Section 2-531

Electronic databases showing state expenditures. (a) On or before July 1, 2011, the legislative Office of Fiscal Analysis shall establish and maintain searchable electronic databases on the Internet and located on said office's Internet web site for purposes of posting state expenditures, including state contracts and grants.

(b) Each budgeted agency, as defined in section 4-69, shall submit, in a timely manner, any information requested by the legislative Office of Fiscal Analysis for the purpose of establishing and maintaining the electronic databases.

(c) On or before January 15, 2013, and annually thereafter, the legislative Office of Fiscal Analysis shall report, in accordance with section 11-4a, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies on the establishment and maintenance of the electronic databases, with any recommendations for improving or expanding the operation or capacity of such databases.

(d) Following the establishment of the electronic databases, the Auditors of Public Accounts shall review the procedures and security used to develop the electronic databases and report, in accordance with section 11-4a, any findings or recommendations based on such review to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a state agency to: (1) Create unavailable financial or management data or an information technology system that does not exist, or (2) disclose consumer, client, patient or student information otherwise protected by law from disclosure.