

Connecticut General Assembly



OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS

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January 15, 2015

Senator Beth Bye, Co-Chair
Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chair
Senator Robert Kane, Ranking Member
Representative Melissa Ziobron, Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
LOB, Room 2600
Hartford, CT 06106

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

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 third 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 five years (FY 10 – FY 14) of expenditure data. In FY 14, the website had 208,450 visitors, an increase of 272% from the previous year, from over 100 countries.

The database³ includes expenditures for all funds (appropriated and non-appropriated) including employee compensation, contracts, vendors, grants, and pensions. For FY 14,

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.

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

the data that is available on the transparency website includes total expenditures of \$36.2 billion. Some of the components are:

- \$17.0 billion in the General Fund (46.9% of the total);
- \$5.9 billion in cost for 91,025 individual employees⁴ associated with salary and fringe benefits (16.4% of the total);
- \$1.6 billion in pension payments (4.3% of the total); and
- \$23.8 billion for 313,156 vendor payments (65.8% of the total).

Changes from Last Report

The website has been redesigned to provide an optimal experience for mobile users as well as traditional desktop users. This redesign embraces the trends influenced by the ubiquitous mobile technologies that have redefined the personal computer. The goal was to provide all users of Transparency.CT.Gov with an outstanding user experience regardless of the device they use to access the website. In addition, the site's appearance has been significantly modified. Flat design principles have been applied to make the site simpler improving readability and usability.

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. UConn, the UConn Health Center and the Board of Regents for Higher Education have provided vendor payment information electronically to us.

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

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

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

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

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

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, and the Board of Regents for Higher Education 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

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 2-53l

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.