

**Testimony before the Joint Committee on Appropriations regarding Governor's Bill 6659,
An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and Making
Appropriations Therefor.**

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February 16, 2023

Good morning. My name is Colleen Murphy and I am the Executive Director and General Counsel of the Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC or Commission). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Commission's Budget, as well as the Governor's Proposed Budget contained in Governor's Bill 6659, for the 2024/2025 Biennium.

Background:

The FOIC is a small independent agency (housed within the Executive Branch, although it is not part of the Executive Branch) with only one program – to administer and enforce the provisions of Connecticut's Freedom of Information Act. But, its mission is large – to ensure that citizens of Connecticut have the most transparent and accountable government to which they are entitled and permitted by law.

The Commission itself consists of nine members, some of whom are appointed by the Governor and others who are appointed by legislative leadership. Commissioners serve as hearing officers in public access disputes and then meet twice a month as a Commission to formally rule on those disputes. It is responsible for the adjudication, on average, of 750 formal citizen complaints a year. The Commission also makes mediation a focal point of its work and resolves on average approximately 65% of its caseload through mediation and complaint review. Further, its attorneys, (in addition to serving as hearing officers in their own right and providing Commissioners with legal counsel during the Commissioners' hearings), represent the Commission at all levels of court, on appeals of Commission decisions (approximately 20 court appeals per year).

In addition to adjudication and mediation, education is a significant component of the FOIC's mission and to that end, FOIC staff conduct approximately one hundred training sessions each year. These sessions are held to educate the public and public officials alike. The FOIC also has two educational outreach programs – one for Spanish speaking individuals and one for middle school and high school aged youths. The FOIC staff handles thousands of telephone and in-person inquiries each year. Staff is also responsible for maintenance and production of a highly fluid web site, which provides visitors to it with up-to-date information on hearings, meetings, Commission and court decisions, upcoming training sessions and frequently asked questions.

Starting in 2011, the FOIC underwent numerous cutbacks and a significant reduction in staff, from its highest of 23 to its lowest of 14 (it now has 16 authorized positions). At present, approximately 93% of its single line-item budget goes toward personnel costs (employee salaries and benefits). The FOIC has streamlined its Business, Human Resource and IT functions and currently shares resources related to these functions with the Office of State Ethics and the State Elections Enforcement Commission pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding.

Budget Submission for the 2024/2025 Biennium:

The FOIC submitted a very lean budget for the upcoming Biennium that sought no increases, other than for mandatory salary and wage adjustments and minor adjustments to its operating expenses (to account for increased operating costs and inflation), as listed below:

FOI Commission Budget Request:

FY 24		FY 25	
Total Personal Services (PS)	\$1,882,537	Total Personal Services (PS)	\$1,906,260
Total Operating Expenses (OE)	\$138,866	Total Operating Expenses (OE)	\$138,866
Total Requested:	\$2,021,403	Total Requested:	\$2,045,126

The Commission is pleased that the Governor's proposed budget, as set forth in Governor's Bill 6659, reflects the Commission's submission to the Office of Policy and Management, as detailed above, and therefore has no objection to it.*

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

*Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 1-205a, the FOIC's budget submission must be passed through, as requested by the Executive Director, directly to the legislature.