



Testimony

Task Force to Study the Conversion of Legislative Documents

November 18, 2010

Good afternoon Chairman Crisco, Chairman Henry and members of the Task Force to Study the Conversion of Legislative Documents from Paper to Electronic Form. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative representative for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 public and private employees.

Council 4 urges you to restore printing of daily legislative material and the transcription of public hearings at the State Capitol. I have been working at the state capitol on a regular basis for thirty years. One of the most challenging aspects of working with a legislature is getting public information in a timely manner and making sure it is widely and quickly disbursed. Public hearings on proposed legislation come up quickly. They can occur within three business days of the printing of a bill. The legislative process can move at break neck speed at times. I cover a lot of territory for our union members, and I cannot imagine being able to do the job effectively without hard copies of legislation. I have used the electronic system. I have experienced the legislative computer system being shut down at times that were crucial. Thankfully I had a paper copy of material that I needed or I would not be able to adequately represent our members. Thinly resourced organizations will be at an even greater disadvantage in participating in the legislative process. While many big corporations and interests have large lobbying staffs and vast electronic resources, many of us who represent public interests work with a shoe string budget. I can tell you where every publicly available electric outlet is in this building and the capitol, and there are not nearly enough to allow people who represent broad swathes of the public to use computers, cell phones, and the like effectively now.

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These buildings are not set up for the gigantic increase in electrical need to allow enough access to make up for the loss of paper copies.

The people who proposed this budget cut are people of good will who are swimming against a tide of budget red ink. But wide and timely dissemination of information, particularly of a legislature, is necessary for a democracy to function. We are already facing a huge threat to democracy in the drastic and continuing loss of daily newspaper coverage. Such a loss of legislative information, particularly transcription of hearings, only adds to the demise of information available to the public. Democracy is not cheap. We recently saw in Bridgeport, where a gubernatorial election could have turned on an effort to save a few dollars on printing too few ballots. Democracy is precarious. The power that a democracy vests in its legislative body is an awesome thing: the power to raise people up out of poverty or to condemn them to it, the power to allow them to marry who they wish or to deny that to them. The stakes of constraining public information are too potentially damaging to the democratic process to risk it, in order to save a very small portion of the state budget.