



State of Connecticut
Department of Economic and
Community Development

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE TASK FORCE TO STUDY CONVERTING LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS FROM PAPER TO ELECTRONIC FORM

November 18, 2010

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The Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) offers the following concerns and recommendations to the Task Force to Study Converting Legislative Documents from Paper to Electronic Form.

During these tough economic times, DECD is fully aware that saving money, especially state taxpayer dollars, is critical. As the state's leading agency for the development and implementation of policies, strategies and programs that support business and community development, growth and innovation, we hear every day from Connecticut businesses that are struggling to survive, and we know how critical cost cutting measures can be. However, with that said, we would urge the Task Force to approach this matter very delicately. While eliminating paper would have an immediate cost savings associated with it, its long term affects could end up costing the state much more than money. While many at the capitol are familiar with the day to day processes and how they work, eliminating paperwork such as the daily bulletins, calendars and other handouts would make it extremely difficult for an everyday citizen to know how to navigate the legislative process.

Additionally, eliminating all of the paper handouts would make it extremely difficult to conduct research. Of particular concern is the proposed elimination of the Public Hearing and Session transcripts. These are extremely valuable to state agencies when determining legislative intent or trying to implement new programs or policies. To do away with these transcripts would be a major disservice and only serve to cause greater confusion when attempting to implement legislative policy or programs.

In closing, DECD would respectfully urge the Task Force to also consider the preliminary recommendations submitted by the Association of Connecticut Lobbyists submitted on October 22, 2010, as DECD believes this could be a good solution to both save money and also maintain the critically needed documents.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments.

Claude Albert, Legislative Chair, Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information

Comments on Proposals Regarding the Conversion of Legislative Documents to Electronic Form

Thursday, November 18, 2010

The Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information has a number of concerns regarding proposals to convert legislative information to electronic form only, especially, the proposal to cease making written transcripts of legislative public hearings.

An unsearchable, audio-only record would ill serve all those involved in public policy, including legislators who make it, journalists who seek to understand it, members of the public who seek to influence it, executive branch officials who must implement it, and members of the judiciary who are asked to interpret it. Appellate litigants and judges often must cite specific accounts of legislative history in their decisions, and the lack of a written record, or at least a searchable one, would make that difficult.

Legislators in particular, often find hearing transcripts vital in coming up to speed on public opinion expressed at hearings or parts of hearings they could not attend. Similarly transcripts enable journalists to efficiently familiarize themselves with the dynamics of a public debate. In practical terms the present proposal will drain much of the usefulness from these critical records. It is worth noting as well that the legislative hearing record captures the only substantive discussion on bills that fail to reach the House or Senate floor or that are passed on consent calendars.

In addition the electronic-only process for managing legislative business envisioned in these proposals raises serious questions about the public's ability to follow legislation accurately in real time. When hundreds of bills with serious public policy impact are moving through the system simultaneously, tracking the line-by-line fate of a particular piece of legislation can be difficult for even sophisticated members of the public. Any electronic tracking system must offer the public ironclad assurances that changes in legislation or the status of a bill are instantly available, easily found and transparent. In addition, some provision must be made to provide timely access to those who do not have a computer or whose computer skills are not sufficiently sophisticated. That access must include a paper copy if requested.