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The Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee regarding the Governor's proposed FY21 Budget Adjustments

February 13, 2020

Representative Toni E. Walker
House Chair
Senator Catherine A. Osten
Senate Chair
Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairwomen Walker and Osten, Ranking Members Lavielle and Formica, and all the members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Michael Savino, I am President of the Connecticut Council on the Freedom of Information (CCFOI) and I am testifying on Governor's proposed FY 21 Budget Adjustments.

The Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information advocates, on behalf of the news media and other open government advocates, for the preservation of Connecticut's Freedom of Information Act. Our organization has been leading the way in the fight for transparency since 1955.

We are a non-partisan organization. Our testimony focuses specifically on the budget for the Freedom of Information Commission, which plays a crucial role in upholding Connecticut's transparency laws. We opposed the Governor's proposal to reallocate part of the FOIC's budget to help fund a Human Resource Specialist position within the Department of Administrative Services. We ask that this money be restored to the FOIC budget.

We understand the need to save money. But watch dog agencies like the FOIC must remain independent in all facets. That includes ensuring that the agency not rely on the Executive Branch for operational support. Such a

move could allow future administrations to interfere with the FOIC or retaliate against the Commission for an unfavorable decision.

Furthermore, we ask that the FOIC restore \$78,073 to fill an existing vacancy for an attorney. The Commission is statutorily required to adjudicate complaints within a year of filing, or they are automatically dismissed. Each year the Commission finds it increasingly difficult to meet the requirement, and filling the vacancy will go a long way to helping.

I would also note that the Governor's decision not to include the FOIC's request for this funding demonstrates the need to keep the agency independent from the Executive Branch. Connecticut General Statute 1-205a requires that the Governor transmit the FOIC's budget request as his own. And yet that's not what happened. Instead, the Governor proposed a cost-saving measure at the expense of transparency, one of the pillars of any healthy democracy.

The Appropriations Committee can show it's support for transparency by restoring funding needed for a FOIC staff attorney and by rejecting the Governor's proposal to shift the agency's Human Resource operations to DAS.

Sincerely,

Michael Savino
President
Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information