

**Testimony before the Joint Committee on Appropriations regarding
Governor’s Bill 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the
Biennium Ending June 30, 2023 and Making Appropriations Therefor.**

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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 Governor’s Proposed Budget for the 2022/2023 Biennium.

By way of background, the FOIC is a small independent body (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. Commission members 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 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.

The Commission underwent numerous cutbacks for a number of years running, starting in 2011 (when the FOIC was consolidated into the Office of Governmental Accountability; it has since returned to a standalone agency). It underwent a significant reduction in staff from its highest of 23 to its lowest today of 15. At present, approximately 92% of its single line-item budget goes toward personnel costs (employee salaries and benefits). The Commission has streamlined its

Business, Human Resource and IT functions and currently shares resources related to these functions with the Office of State Ethics and State Elections Enforcement Commission pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding.

In terms of its budget, the FOIC has always believed that it must be part of the solution to the fiscal burdens that face our state and recognizes that the ongoing pandemic has created additional financial challenges. It therefore submitted a very lean budget that sought no increases beyond its FY 21 baseline for both FY 22 and FY 23, other than mandatory salary and wage adjustments, as listed below:

FOIC's Baseline Budget (based off of FY 21):	\$1,707,192
Salary and Wage adjustments for COLAs and Annual Increments:	\$16,064

FOIC's Total Budget Request for both FY 22 and FY 23:	\$1,723,256

The Commission is pleased that the Governor's proposed budget reflects the Commission's submission to the Office of Policy and Management, as detailed above (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) and does not propose any additional cutbacks. The Governor's proposed budget adds funding in FY 23 for the 27th payroll in that year, in the amount of \$59,651, bringing the total recommended amount for **FY 23 to \$1,782,907.***

I am happy to answer any questions you may have today and look forward to discussing the Commission's proposed budget in greater detail with the subcommittee in the near future.

*The Commission notes that in the Governor's bill, the Appropriation for the FOI Commission contains an additional \$22.00, bringing the total for **FY 23 to \$1,782,929.**