

Planning and Development Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-336

AN ACT CONCERNING THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OF HARTFORD

Title: COUNTY'S INDEPENDENT CONSUMER ADVOCATE.

Vote Date: 3/22/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/6/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill primarily makes three changes regarding the Independent Consumer Advocate, which is tasked with advocating for consumer interests in MDC matters:

- increases the maximum annual costs the advocate may charge to the MDC from \$50,000 to \$70,000;
- allows the Office of Consumer Counsel ((OCC), an independent state agency), rather than the MDC board of directors, to authorize consumer advocate expenditures above the normal annual costs (when there is a substantial need); and
- removes the requirement that the OCC appoint the consumer advocate by November in advance of the advocate's term, which starts Jan. 1, and clarifies the term may be altered if there is a vacancy or the OCC determines it is in consumers' best interest.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Consumer Counsel, Claire E. Coleman](#)

Expresses support of section 1(a)'s proposal to raise the annual compensation of the ICA to \$70,000 due to the tremendous workload and responsibility with which the position entails. Furthermore, the ICA position is significant in the advocacy for policies and procedures that benefit consumers. The increase in the annual compensation may widen the applicant pool as well, allowing for the attraction of more qualified candidates for application. The OCC further supports section 1(c), which is essential to create the necessary flexibility regarding dates and appointment lengths in the event that the OCC is unable to select a new ICA.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Judy Allen, West Hartford

Strongly supports strengthening the position of MDC Independent Consumer Advocate. States that before the position was created customers has limited access to information and no clear avenue for input. States a desire for a better relationship between the MDC board and the consumer advocate, which would benefit customers.

Third Act, Alma Elder

In support of SB 336 based on the helpful experience with the Independent Consumer Advocate, who was able to answer many questions regarding operational procedures, etc. Described the useful and important work done in this position.

Third Act, Ted Loewenthal

In support of SB 336 and supports the change of funding fees and expenses without the oversight of the MDC due to the conflict of interest it may present. Further mentions the lack of applicants to fill this position, and suspects that inadequate funding may be a result of such.

William OConnor, West Hartford

In support of SB 336 in order to strengthen the position of the MDC. Supports the ICA position to help with consumer issues, as well as monitor and report on decisions of the MDC.

Connecticut General Assembly, Senator, Derek Slap

In support of Senate Bill 336 to strengthen the position of the Independent Consumer Advocate for the Metropolitan District. The ICA's duties are varied and expansive, and they are responsible for saving the ratepayer's significant and copious amounts of money in water costs and time addressing claims and disputes with the MDC. He reiterates that the annual compensation is not investment enough to retain candidates for the position, and the increase of their compensation would allow the advocate to represent the ratepayers adequately.

The Metropolitan District, Independent Consumer Advocate, Joseph D. Szerejko

Expresses support for SB 336 so that it may empower the ICA's capabilities. The \$50,000 statutory cap imposed under the current operative statue is not enough to garner applicants for the job, which he is currently doing on an interim basis until the successor is selected. Currently, the OCC has not received any applicants, and the annual compensation is not sufficient enough to cover the additional hours of phone calls and work the ICA performs. Furthermore, the empowerment of this position's capabilities would provide them with the necessary oversight to advocate for consumer when the ICA's interest and the district's

interests are not in alignment. That being said, to ask the same District officials for an increase in funding could cause a potential conflict of interest.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION

[The Metropolitan District \(MDC\), District Counsel, Chris Stone](#)

Expresses opposition due to concerns over the provisions that warrant an increase in fees and expenses paid by the MDC to the ICA. As the Bill would eliminate the MDC Board of its authority to approve an increase in fees and expenses in extraordinary situations, the authority will be exclusively vested in the Office of Consumer Counsel, which is perceived as a lack of cooperation by the MDC. Finally, he expresses that willingness to cooperate with the ICA, and mentions that there has never been reluctance to be responsible in the execution of their responsibilities. Furthermore, he recommends that the responsibility for and the source of payment of the ICA fees and expenses should rest with the State of Connecticut.

Additional testimony in opposition:

[Gary Corigliano](#)
[Linda Dalessio](#)

Reported by: Anna Macaulay

Date: 4/3/24