

Constituencies Speak Out Against Pared Down State Government

by Christine Stuart | March 16, 2009 4:45 PM

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Sen. Gayle Slossberg and Rep. James Spallone, co-chairs of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, confer during Monday's public hearing.

The legislature's General Administrations and Elections Committee heard hours of testimony Monday regarding Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposal to abolish or consolidate 23 agencies.

Rell's Budget Secretary Robert Genuario told the committee that the governor's proposal to consolidate and in some cases abolish these agencies and commissions was not done to cast aspersions on the good work they have done, but to avoid the duplication of services and streamline state government.

"Some of the consolidations you will see are before you because we believe there's a more efficient way to run state government," Genuario said.

The merger of the Department of Higher Education with the Department of Education, the elimination of the Healthcare Advocate's Office and Office of Consumer Counsel, the merger of the Child Advocate with the Attorney General's office, and the elimination of six civil rights commissions were all up for discussion Monday at the committee's public hearing.



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Robert S. Poliner, the state's ombudsman for property rights, testifies Monday before the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

Genuario said the state already has an array of privately funded groups which serve the same constituencies as some of these commissions Rell proposed eliminating.

But several of the constituencies served by these commissions and agencies disagreed with Genuario's statement.

State Child Advocate Jeanne Milstein said merging her position with the Attorney General's office would "eviscerate the statutory authority and responsibilities of the Child Advocate."

"While it is rare that my office takes legal action on behalf of a child, when it does, our opponent is the Attorney General," she said highlighting the importance of her office's independence.



MELISSA BAILEY FILE PHOTO

Budget Secretary Robert Genuario

Kevin Galvin also took exception to Genuario's testimony.

"In short Kevin Lembo's staff saved my daughter's life," Galvin said referring to the

Office of the Healthcare Advocate, which was slated for elimination by Rell.

He said his daughter who was unable to get treatment for her anorexia under the family's insurance policy was wasting away. He said after calling the governor's office and the Insurance Department and not receiving a response he happened across the Office of the Healthcare Advocate. He said he finds it odd that the state would even be talking about closing an agency which does so much good. He said he did not find Genuario's testimony compelling.

But Genuario said "we believe there is a limit for taxpayers to afford state government and a shadow state government." He said he believed the Office of the Healthcare Advocate was a duplicative function because it's something the Insurance Department's consumer affairs unit already does.

Genuario said the taxpayer funded advocacy done by these agencies and commissions is less of a priority during these tough economic times than the delivery of core services.

"If we're not careful we run the risk of eliminating programs that hurt the people in this state," Sen. Gayle Slossberg, D-Milford, said.

Genuario warned lawmakers from looking at these consolidations and eliminations one by one. He said they should look at the cumulative effect of all of these reductions.

Slossberg said the committee will be looking at which agencies serve the needs of Connecticut's citizens best when it considers the governor's proposal.

State agencies Rell would eliminate:

1. Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission.
2. African-American Affairs Commission
3. Commission on Children
4. Commission on Aging
5. Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
6. Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission
7. Office of Consumer Counsel
8. Office of Health Care Advocate
9. Property Rights Ombudsman
10. Department of Corrections Ombudsman

State agencies Rell would merge:

1. Board of Accountancy into Department of Consumer Protection
2. Commission on Culture and Tourism into Department of Economic and Community Development
3. Criminal Justice Commission into Criminal Justice Division
4. Board of Firearms Permit Examiners into Department of Public Safety
5. Office of the child advocate into the attorney general's office
6. Children's Trust Fund Council into Department of Children and Families
7. Council on Environmental Quality into Department of Environmental Protection
8. Gaming Policy Board into Division of Special Revenue
9. Department of Higher Education into Department of Education
10. Office of claims commissioner, State Properties Review Board, State Marshal Commission, and State Insurance and Risk Management Board, all into Department of Administrative Services

challenged political hacks at DSS, DCF, and the other failed departments. If they came close to doing their jobs, we wouldn't need all these extra agencies to watch out for the many residents they abuse, mishandle, and/or ignore.

"If we're not careful we run the risk of eliminating programs that hurt the people in this state," Sen. Gayle Slossberg, D-Milford, said."

Ah! Agreement! As I said, if we have to eliminate programs, let's eliminate the programs that hurt the people in this state! (?)

Posted by: Yellow_dog | March 16, 2009 11:02 PM

It was a good run while it lasted but we can't afford overlapping and duplicate services any longer.

It is time for the special interests to throw in the towel and realize that the gravy train has left the station.

Posted by: Jay



| March 16, 2009 11:20 PM

Does it not strike anyone that the departments that the commissions being merged into departments are the commissions that investigate the departments they are being merged into???

Example

Criminal Justice Commission into Criminal Justice Division

Now, can anyone say "conflict of interest." This is nothing more than the usual Republican formula for solving a problem. We have a deficit, cut state services. We have a surplus, cut state services and give tax breaks to companies who will suck the public service system dry. It is no wonder that the Republicans are failing to lead on these economic problems, they lack leadership skills. They have no vision except to help companies move their assets offshore to avoid paying taxes.

This one makes sense

Office of the child advocate into the attorney general's office. Now when the child advocate goes to court this should be much easier. Instead of going to court they can have a fight within their own office. When the office of child advocate goes to court usually the Attorney General's office is their opponent. So now they can save all that money and role the offices into one person.

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So we now have the root of the Rell Administration's program. Won't raise taxes on the rich or the corporations what have had extensive tax breaks over the last 20 years. But we will cut all state programs for all those who did not have the foresight to hire a bunch of lobbyists or contributors to the Governor's campaign fund.

To be fair, the Governor inherited this problem. But now she has been elected in her own right. After 2 years of inheritance of a slowing economy and you have done nothing about it but offer old outdated ideas, it becomes Rell's problem.

This is not to say that good administration of funds is a bad thing. However, I can't help wonder why Rell and her lot have nothing to offer but cuts for the most disadvantaged. We know times are tough for average citizens let's not make them desperate times.

Posted by: ROBN | March 17, 2009 9:50 AM

One casts aspersions, not "dispersions"

Posted by: christine | March 17, 2009 10:00 AM

ROBN you're right. He did say "dispersions" but "aspersions" is the proper word. Thanks for the edit.

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