



April 11, 2007

Taxpayers Support Creating Spending Database in Connecticut

Dear Legislator:

On behalf of our thousands of members in Connecticut, we ask you to cosponsor a bill (HB 6809) introduced by Representative William Hamzy to create a public website that lists state grants, contracts, projects, and loans. Providing an easy-to-use tool like the searchable database proposed by HB 6809 would better enable state residents to make sense of how their tax dollars are being parceled out. Timely access to this information is crucial for helping taxpayers make their own evaluations of the state's spending priorities. This legislation deserves your support.

As you may know, last year President Bush signed S. 2590, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, into law. Cosponsored by Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Barack Obama (D-IL), the bipartisan legislation directs the U.S. Office of Management and Budget to create a searchable online database that the general public can use to track the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars in federal grant and contract expenditures.

Connecticut residents deserve the same access. While more than a dozen other states have limited versions of spending disclosure websites, no state to date has created a single comprehensive database. By acting now, Connecticut has the opportunity to lead the nation in making spending more easily accessible to the public.

In fact, Connecticut has already made bond allocations accessible to the general public through the Internet. The Connecticut Bond Allocation Database tracks the billions in state spending that is financed through borrowing. Each record contains the following information: the date of authorization for the project funding, the primary recipient or beneficiary of the funds, the primary use of the funds, the specific program category under which the project falls, the total amount of funding authorized, and a brief description of the project. As Connecticut State Comptroller Nancy Wyman describes it, what started as an internal staff project to monitor state bond allocations turned into something of greater use:

As the design and implementation phases progressed, I decided the public should have access to this information as well. The result is this database, which ... is part of my ongoing initiative to open the state's books to citizens, public advocates, academics and the media in order to enhance their important oversight role in the government's system of checks and balances.

It's time to bring this kind of access to other types of state spending, including grants, contracts, projects, and loans. Passage of HB 6809 would accomplish just that.

As we found at the federal level, support for this bill will likely transcend party lines. Advocates from across the opinion spectrum share the common notion that transparency of and public access to government information is vital to the health of our political system. We sincerely hope you decide to sponsor this legislation and help pass it into law. If we can be of any assistance in this effort, please do not hesitate to call upon us.

Sincerely,

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