



Susan Bysiewicz
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz
Board of Aldermen Finance Committee – City of New Haven
September 20, 2007

Good evening chairman Sergio Rodriguez and members of the finance committee. For the record, my name is Susan Bysiewicz and I am the secretary of the state. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you tonight regarding the resolution calling for review of city contracts, state and federal law to provide for the revocation and reduction of any retirement benefit or payment due to city officials or employees convicted of crimes related to their employment.

First, I want to commend you for becoming the first and only city in Connecticut to adopt public financing and to establish a Democracy Fund. You should and will serve as a model for other municipalities across the state. I believe the same can be said of the resolution being discussed tonight regarding revocation of and reduction of retirement benefits for public officials convicted of crimes related to their office.

Scandals in both our state and municipal governments, and in both our executive and legislative branches, have damaged the credibility of government in the eyes of the public. Connecticut taxpayers also pay a hefty price.

Peter Ellef is collecting \$22,000 a year while he serves time at a federal prison and in a few years - when John Rowland turns 55 - taxpayers will be paying \$50,000 per year, plus medical benefits, to the former governor. To be sure, this is not a partisan issue. There are also Democrats, including former State Sen. Ernie Newton, who are collecting state benefits long after their conviction on corruption charges.

Thirteen states, including Massachusetts and Rhode Island, have enacted laws that revoke or reduce pension or other retirement benefits of public officials and top appointees who are convicted of a crime related to their employment. And earlier this year the U.S. Senate and House each unanimously approved a measure whereby members of Congress convicted of serious crimes would lose their taxpayer-paid

pensions, some amounting to more than \$100,000 a year. If Democratic and Republican members of Congress can agree on such a proposal, surely we can do the same in Connecticut.

This past legislative session I testified in favor of several legislative proposals which would reduce or eliminate altogether pensions for public officials convicted of fraud. Such a penalty would serve as a powerful deterrent to the people in power. It would also ensure that convicted politicians can't use their state pensions to pay-off court ordered fines and restitution, which is common practice now.

As we all know there is also corruption at the municipal level and that is why I feel the resolution being discussed tonight is so important. I understand that the proposed resolution calls for a committee to study city contracts, in addition to state and federal law, and then make a specific proposal that would have to be negotiated with bargaining units. I feel strongly that ultimately any proposal should address the concerns of union employees, protect whistle blowers and take into consideration special circumstances where there are domestic relations orders.

Both at the state and municipal level it is vital that new laws or ordinances be clear and balanced. I support provisions that allow the court to consider the severity of the crime, the amount of monetary loss suffered by the state, and the degree of public trust that was violated before anyone was stripped of their benefits.

In reality, the real danger is doing nothing. Previous scandals forced Connecticut's elected officials to make government more open, transparent, and accountable. I have heard from many who are shocked pension revocation isn't already law. It's time we finally get this done.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you tonight and if any member of the Board of Aldermen wants assistance from my office in their efforts to enact a resolution please don't hesitate to call.

-END-