

House Republican Press Release

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Press Office: 860-240-8700

**A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE State Representative Ruth Fahrbach**



**Ethics bill a step in the right direction**

Corrupt state officials and workers could lose their pensions under a Republican-led compromise ethics reform bill that was passed by a 35-0 margin in the State Senate on April 16. Republicans proposed a nine-point proposal that reflects the outcomes of a Republican-Democratic working group this spring.

Earlier talks concerning a proposed ethics bill broke down because the bill did not include a “true” pension revocation provision nor did it require the reporting of witnessing a bribe. The House and Senate Republican proposal, which incorporates nearly all of the provisions we know to be important to Gov. Rell and the legislature, included:

- **PENSION REVOCATION:** Calls upon the Attorney General to petition the court for pension reduction or revocation for state employees, public officials and municipal officials upon their pleading guilty or no contest to or being convicted of a crime related to their position;
- **FAILURE TO REPORT A BRIBE:** Makes failing to report a bribe a Class A Misdemeanor, if a public servant (which includes state employees and elected officials) knew or should have known a bribe was being offered to them or another public servant;
- **CAMPAIGN SOLICITATIONS:** Bars chiefs of staff of the legislative caucuses from soliciting campaign contributions from legislative caucus staff for state, district or municipal races; Bars chiefs of staff of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor from soliciting contributions from members of their respective staffs, including commissioners and deputy commissioners, for state, district or municipal races; Bars chiefs of staff of state-wide elected (Constitutional Officers) officials from soliciting campaign contributions from their respective staffs for state, district or municipal races;
- **MANDATORY ETHICS TRAINING:** Requires ethics training for all newly-elected legislators starting no later than Dec. 2010, and requires refresher courses for

incumbent legislators every four years starting in 2011, except that if the Ethics Code is significantly changed, the Joint Committee on Legislative Management can request legislators go through a refresher course;

- **LIMITING MAJOR LIFE EVENTS:** Limits gifts under the “major life event” (such as weddings, graduations, etc.) exception to \$1,000 or less;
- **GOVERNOR’S SPOUSE:** Includes the Governor’s spouse in the definition of “public official” for the purposes of the ethics code;
- **PUBLIC AGENCY POSTING OF INFORMATION:** Requires the posting of: minutes of a public meeting within seven days of the meeting on the agency’s Web site, the schedule of regular meetings for a calendar year by January 31st of that year and, a notice of any special meeting on the agency’s Web site not less than 24 hours before the meeting;
- **CONFORMING CHANGE TO CONTRACTING PROVISION:** Prohibits a state contractor for one year from offering employment to a state official or employee who participated in a significant way in the awarding of the contract to that state contractor;
- **OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS (“OSE”)—Ex Parte Communications, Subpoena Powers, and Attendance of Members of the Citizens’ Ethics Advisory Board (“CEAB”).** Prohibits *ex parte* communications between the CEAB, any of its members, and the trial judge referee or the enforcement division of the OSE concerning the complaint or the subject of the complaint; Requires CEAB members to be present during all enforcement action hearings in order to vote on the enforcement action; and the OSE may issue a subpoena provided either the CEAB takes a majority vote to issue the subpoena or the chair signs the subpoena. The vice-chair may sign if the chair is unavailable.

While I believe that a stronger pension revocation provision is preferable, the compromise ethics bill deserves to get an up or down vote in the House of Representatives. I urge the Democratic majority to give this ethics compromise the attention it deserves. Undoubtedly my constituents will agree that an ethical government is of utmost importance to them.

*State Rep. Ruth Fahrbach represents the 61<sup>st</sup> District, including Suffield, and parts of Windsor and East Granby, in the General Assembly.*