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Written Testimony
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RAISED SB 1048 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE ONLINE DATABASE FOR STATE EXPENDITURES.

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Raised Senate Bill No. 1048: An Act Concerning The Online Database for State Expenditures.

In 2013, my office launched OpenConnecticut, an online repository of state financial data. Since its inception, OpenConnecticut has evolved to include real-time data on state government spending, monthly budgetary overviews, up-to-date compensation data for state employees and retirees, checkbook-level spending by quasi-public agencies and several other tools to help Connecticut residents better understand how their tax dollars are being spent.

Cumulatively, the OpenConnecticut sites have been viewed over 3.2 million times by 1.6 million unique visitors.

OpenConnecticut is also now the primary evaluative platform used by the United States Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) to grade the open government efforts by states throughout the country. In its most recent report, PIRG assigned Connecticut an A-, the fifth-highest score in the nation. That represents a marked improvement from our state's standing earlier this decade.

Currently, state statute assigns the responsibility for maintaining Connecticut's open government site to the legislature's Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA). This has led to two sites operating in tandem, but using different data. The Comptroller's Office provides static data to OFA on an annual basis for use on its required transparency sites, offering a snapshot in time of government spending. Soon after its upload, that data begins to conflict with the real-time results produced on OpenConnecticut.

Reducing the duplicative efforts of OFA and my office should help eliminate any confusion as to which site is producing the most accurate and up-to-date results.

This legislation would codify the transparency efforts of my office into state law. OpenConnecticut was created to offer greater insight to taxpayers and other stakeholders and I am always seeking new ways to improve and expand it further. As I often say, transparency has no finish line. However, it is critical that steps be taken to ensure future Comptrollers continue on that path and be held to the same expectations of transparency and accountability.

Additionally, this legislation would require the state's quasi-public agencies to provide checkbook-level expenses and other data for the purpose of publishing on OpenConnecticut. In recent years, I have asked this of the quasi-public agencies and most have voluntarily complied. However, adding that requirement to state law will ensure that the open government efforts of my office outlive my administration.

If you have questions about OpenConnecticut, please reach out to my office. Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important legislation.