

Government Oversight Committee  
(Joint Legislative Committee on Program Evaluation  
and Government Accountability)

**Meeting Summary**  
**February 9, 2005**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Co-chair, Senator Gagnon, called the meeting to order at approximately 9:20 a.m. in the Labor Committee Room.

**ROLL CALL**

Senators: Sen. Gagnon, Sen. Courtney, Sen. Mitchell, Sen. Raye

Absent: Sen. Dow, Sen. Perry

Representatives: Rep. Dugay, Rep. Canavan, Rep. Collins, Rep. Crosthwaite,  
Rep. O'Brien, Rep. Trahan

Legislative Officers: Beth Ashcroft, Director, Office of Program Evaluation and  
Government Accountability

**BACKGROUND DISCUSSION**

Members of the Committee introduced themselves and briefly commented on their general expectations for OPEGA. Sen. Gagnon introduced OPEGA Director Beth Ashcroft who highlighted for the Committee the general philosophy she would be following in carrying out the responsibilities of her position.

Rep. Trahan and Sen. Gagnon briefed the Committee on relevant information related to the history of OPEGA and actions initiated by the Government Oversight Committee of the 121<sup>st</sup> Legislature.

The Committee reviewed the current OPEGA statute (Title 3, Chapter 337) and the current proposed amendment to the Statute (L.D. 245 – An Act to Enact an Immediate Review System in the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability) sponsored by Rep. Crosthwaite. Rep. Crosthwaite explained his motivation for introducing the bill. Other Committee members expressed interest in this concept and commented that there may be situations other than fraud or financial mismanagement that would also warrant an immediate review. The Committee agreed to discuss the possibilities and details of an immediate review system further at a future meeting.

The Committee also briefly discussed possible other changes that may need to be made to the Statute as OPEGA further defines itself and gains experience in the evaluation process.

Director Ashcroft presented a Summary of Roles and Responsibilities of the Director and the Committee as defined by the Statute as well as additional roles and responsibilities she believed should be discussed and clarified. Discussion ensued and Committee members identified additional roles and responsibilities to be added to the Summary. Director Ashcroft will revise the Summary which the Committee intends to continue to modify as necessary. Sen. Gagnon suggested that the Summary become a formalized statement of roles and responsibilities agreed to between the Director and the Committee and incorporated by reference into the Committee Rules. Other members of the Committee were in agreement.

The Committee also discussed the relationship between the Government Oversight Committee and the Joint Standing Committees. It was noted that in particular there was a unique relationship between the Oversight Committee and the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government through which proposed bills related to the OPEGA Statute would come. The Committee agreed that it would be valuable to clearly define communication channels and responsibilities between the Oversight Committee and the other Joint Standing Committees. Rep. Trahan suggested that the Oversight Committee host a “Meet and Greet” session for the Legislative Leadership and Chairs of the Joint Standing Committees. The Committee agreed this would be a good idea.

#### **STATUS OF OFFICE STARTUP ACTIVITIES**

Director Ashcroft briefed the Committee on the status of Office start up activities including hiring of staff, creation of Office space, research into other states’ programs and building relationships.

#### **REVIEW AND ADOPT COMMITTEE RULES**

The Committee reviewed the Oversight Committee Rules that had been adopted by the previous Committee with suggested revisions that had been made by Director Ashcroft. Discussion ensued with suggestions made by Committee members as to other items to add to the Rules. Specifically, the Committee members agreed to amend the Rules as follows:

- include a requirement that the membership of any subcommittees of the Oversight Committee be bipartisan in nature; and
- incorporate a reference to the Summary of Roles and Responsibilities that the Committee and Director will agree upon.

Decision of exactly where to add these items in the Rules was left to Director Ashcroft. The Committee discussed possible other future amendments to be decided upon at a later date.

**Motion:** That the Committee Rules be adopted as revised and amended. (Motion by Rep. Trahan, second by Sen. Courtney, unanimous.)

## **REVIEW AND ADOPT COMMITTEE MISSION STATEMENT**

Due to time constraints, the Committee will take up this item at a future meeting.

## **TALKING AND THINKING POINTS FOR GOING FORWARD**

Sen. Gagnon initiated discussion on the evaluation selection process by illustrating the Chairs' proposed framework for that process. Much discussion ensued with suggestions for refinements being made by other Committee members and the Director. Director Ashcroft will prepare a flowchart of a proposed evaluation selection process which incorporates the key elements and objectives emerging from the discussion for further consideration by the Committee at its next meeting.

There was some additional discussion regarding efforts to keep the public and others informed of OPEGA Committee and Office activities. The Director mentioned that she intended to develop a website. The possibility of doing press releases was also considered. The Director was asked to draft a press release covering current activities for Committee review at the next meeting.

Due to time constraints, the remainder of the topics under this agenda item will be discussed at future meeting. Director Ashcroft did make the Committee members aware that they had been provided additional materials on Potential OPEGA roles, product/services and scope areas that they might find useful to review prior to the next meeting.

## **FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETING OBJECTIVES AND SCHEDULE**

The next meeting of the Government Oversight Committee was scheduled for Monday, February 14, 2005 at 3:00 p.m. in the Labor Committee Room.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.