

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

**Meeting Summary  
August, 8, 2005**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Co-chair, Rep. DuGay, called the meeting to order at approximately 9:40 a.m. in the Labor Committee Room.

**ATTENDANCE**

Senators: Sen. Gagnon, Sen. Dow, Sen. Courtney, Sen. Raye  
Absent: Sen. Mitchell, Sen. Perry

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

Legislative Officers and Staff: Beth Ashcroft, Director, OPEGA  
Diana Stiles Friou, Principal Analyst, OPEGA  
Lorna Pelkey, Administrative Secretary, OPEGA

**SUMMARY OF July 18th MEETING**

The Committee did not request any changes to the July 18th meeting summary.

**REPORT FROM OPEGA DIRECTOR**

**OPEGA Positions**

Director Ashcroft informed the Committee that the hiring process is complete for the four new OPEGA staff members. She related that the names are not available at this time as the other finalists have not yet been notified. She expects to be in a position to release the four names by the end of the week. In addition, Director Ashcroft described the very thorough, intensive hiring process the OPEGA staff went through and indicated she is pleased with the outcome. She explained that OPEGA will have four analysts instead of one senior analyst and three analysts as she had originally planned. This is primarily because all of the new staff members are capable of leading project teams and also have different areas of expertise.

**Status of On-going Evaluations**

Director Ashcroft stated that the Guardian Ad Litem review has been on hold pending the completion of the hiring process. She updated the Committee on the status of the RFP for the

IS Systems review noting that three vendors had submitted bids. Interviews will now be held with the vendors as necessary to help determine who the successful bidder will be. The Director also mentioned that the Rapid Response review, DHHS Late Payments to Providers, is underway.

### **Status of Evaluation Topics**

Director Ashcroft briefly reviewed the status of evaluation topics that have been considered by the Committee so far. Rep. DuGay asked about the status of the Spurwink topic. The Director answered that the Committee will determine the status of all of the on-deck topics when they review the Annual Work Plan later in the meeting.

### **Old Business**

A discussion ensued related to the Government Oversight Committee's Voting Processes and Procedures. Regarding item number 7 under "jacketed" process, Rep. Trahan said he doesn't feel the OPEGA staff should have to chase absent committee members down to have them come in to vote. Director Ashcroft stated that her practice in the past has been to e-mail the absent member the details of the jacketed vote, as well as speak to them via telephone (or leave a voice message if there is no answer). It is the consensus of the Committee that an e-mail and a phone call is sufficient notification. The Committee also discussed combining the two different "jacket" processes shown on the draft Voting Processes and Procedures as the processes were the same with the exception of one item.

**Motion:** That the Committee adopt the Voting Processes and Procedures as written but combining the two "jacket" processes by moving item number 3 (Rapid Response Voting process) into the "jacket" process for voting on OPEGA Reports. (Motion by Rep. Trahan, second by Sen. Raye. Motion – PASSED; vote unanimous.)

### **Unfinished Business**

The Director briefed the Committee on options for initiating a "hotline" service so that individuals will have a vehicle to notify OPEGA with concerns. She presented two options:

1. *Contracting with an outside vendor to receive "hotline" calls and generate a report to OPEGA.*

Director Ashcroft explained that there were third party vendors who offered "hotline" services. She said she had contacted one vendor she was familiar with from past experience to get an idea of what the cost would be. The pricing from this vendor was based on the number of employees for the State. Based on an estimate of 13,000 employees, the Director received a proposal that would cost \$11,500 for the first year. The vendor indicated a willingness to adjust the rate for future years based on actual hotline activity. The Director noted that such a third party arrangement offered the benefits of:

- A trained interviewer available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week to answer hotline calls, plus web and e-mail reporting options;
- A resulting report to OPEGA that contained adequate details for OPEGA to understand the nature of the concern and determine whether it could be validated;
- Not tying up OPEGA staff time trying to take and document "hotline" calls; and

- Providing a truly anonymous avenue for the person making the call while still providing a way for OPEGA to obtain additional information from the caller at a later date.

## 2. *Establishing a “hotline” avenue directly to OPEGA.*

Director Ashcroft explained that the other option would be to have a special hotline number, e-mail address and/or web-based form for someone to submit complaints directly to OPEGA. The Director noted that although this seemed less costly, she was concerned with the amount of OPEGA staff resources it would take to effectively manage the “hotline”. She also mentioned that unless there was someone constantly available to handle the calls, OPEGA may end up with information that was not detailed enough to follow-up on, especially if the caller wanted to remain anonymous.

Committee members felt that although they want some sort of hotline for the future, they wanted to proceed slowly at this time. They expressed concern that OPEGA’s resources could get eaten up or that, because of limited resources, OPEGA may not be able to respond to “hotline” complaints in a timely manner. Sen. Courtney noted that individuals wishing to report a concern already have avenues, i.e. contacting their Legislator, contacting a GOC member, or calling OPEGA at the phone number on the website. Consequently, there is no rush to establish a specific hotline. Rep. Collins stated that he thinks it would be a good idea for Director Ashcroft to seek proposals from several other outside vendors. Sen. Raye expressed interest in knowing what other states are doing and experiencing with regard to hotlines.

**Motion:** That OPEGA will research what hotline models other states use, solicit additional third party vendor proposals to bring back to the Committee, develop a strategy to utilize for calls that do come in to OPEGA and present the results of this work to the Committee at a future meeting. (Motion by Sen. Raye, second by Rep. Collins, Motion – PASSED – vote: 7 in favor, one opposed. Those in favor: Rep. Collins, Sen. Courtney, Rep. Crosthwaite, Rep. DuGay, Sen. Gagnon, Sen. Raye, Rep. Trahan. Those opposed: Sen. Dow.)

### **New Business**

Director Ashcroft presented the current list of review topics “On-Deck” and proposed that those topics highlighted in yellow be part of OPEGA’s Annual Work Plan for FY06. She reviewed the hours estimated to complete each review, the responsible department, and whether a consultant may be hired for the project. The Director answered questions from the Committee regarding:

- Total estimated work hours for the Work Plan
- Hours available for other activities
- Timeframe(s) for completing the topics currently under review
- Whether OPEGA can provide dates when their reports on each review would be submitted
- Providing for additional review topics (such as Rapid Response items)

Sen. Gagnon stated his concerns about approving the Annual Work Plan at this meeting since four Committee members are absent and other individuals may want to review and comment on it. He noted that the document is a very public document and this is a very big vote. He suggested that the Committee make adjustments to OPEGA’s proposed Plan as it deemed

appropriate and then wait to take a final vote on approval of the modified Plan in a couple of weeks.

Rep. Trahan stated he feels it is important to move the Work Plan forward and the Committee can reconsider and change as need be, as priorities might change. Sen. Dow reiterated he would anticipate the Annual Work Plan will change in the future and it is important that the Committee move ahead today. Other Committee members agreed.

The Committee took a break at 11:15 a.m. and re-convened at 11:48 a.m.

There was some discussion regarding how the Committee would monitor OPEGA's progress. Rep. DuGay suggested that OPEGA report monthly or quarterly how many hours have been utilized on the reviews in progress against the estimated Budget. He is concerned about keeping track of the hours OPEGA has available at any point in time. Director Ashcroft emphasized that the budgeted hours she had developed were very rough for this first year as OPEGA did not yet have experience in how long such reviews might actually take. While OPEGA will make every effort to scope its projects such that they may be accomplished within budget, there are a number of factors that can seriously impact the number of hours needed on a particular project and how long (from a calendar prospective) it takes to complete the review even if the number of hours spent is within the estimated Budget. Two such significant factors will be the availability of agency personnel and the degree to which data and information OPEGA seeks is readily available in a useable format. Sen. Raye feels the Committee should be advised if any agency under review is not cooperative with OPEGA, and the Committee could send a letter to that agency. This situation would apply, of course, if the agency is being unreasonable.

As a result of this discussion, the Director agreed to provide the Committee with the following at the next meeting:

1. An estimate of the fiscal quarters in which OPEGA reports on the Annual Plan reviews could be expected;
2. Notations on the original source of the review topic for all Annual Plan and On-Deck items; and
3. A Budget to actual comparison of hours expended on reviews in progress.

The Committee proceeded to go through the topics on the Annual Work Plan and amended the following three:

- Moved the Bureau of Motor Vehicles Branch Offices off the Annual Plan and back to On-Deck status – 7 in favor, 1 opposed (Sen. Gagnon);
- Moved Child Protective Services Phase II off the Annual Plan and back to On-Deck status – vote unanimous; and
- Moved Spurwink Schools (Program) from On-Deck status onto the Annual Plan – 7 in favor, 1 opposed (Sen. Gagnon).

After the above discussion, the following motion occurred:

**Motion:** That the Committee approve the OPEGA Annual Work Plan as amended. (Moved by Sen. Raye, seconds by Rep. Trahan and Rep. Collins – Motion – PASSED – 7 in favor, 1 opposed. Those in favor: Rep. Collins, Sen. Courtney, Rep. Crosthwaite, Sen. Dow, Rep.

DuGay, Sen. Raye, Rep. Trahan. Those opposed: Sen. Gagnon.) Note: Absentee voting on this item remained open until Wednesday, August 10<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. No absentee votes were registered.

**Next Meeting**

The Committee requested Director Ashcroft to set the next GOC meeting after Labor Day and the members would like to discuss the remaining agenda items at that meeting.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.