

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

Meeting Summary
May 2, 2005

CALL TO ORDER

The Co-chair, Rep. Dugay, called the meeting to order at approximately 4:15 p.m. in the Labor Committee Room.

ATTENDANCE

Senators: Sen. Courtney, Sen. Dow
Absent: Sen. Gagnon, Sen. Perry, Sen. Mitchell
(Sen. Raye joined meeting in progress)

Representatives: Rep. Dugay, Rep. Collins, Rep. Crosthwaite,
Rep. O'Brien, Rep. Trahan
Absent: (Rep. Canavan joined meeting in progress)

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

SUMMARY OF April 25th MEETING

Director Ashcroft requested the Committee review the meeting summary so that the Administrative Secretary could add/clarify some information related to the Committee's actions. The Committee did not request any other changes.

REPORT FROM OPEGA DIRECTOR

The Director advised the Committee that since the budget passed, she plans to start the process the end of May to hire four additional analysts to bring on board by July 1.

She also mentioned that it is a priority to get the website up and running quickly. She feels it is very important that the public is able to access information about OPEGA. Director Ashcroft would like a policies and procedures manual in place before the new staff comes on board. She has asked a consultant to present a proposal for developing that manual.

Director Ashcroft stated that the OPEGA informational briefing for Commissioners/Directors/Agency Liaisons will be held on May 16th at 9:00 a.m. in Room 220. After the briefing, an open house will be held at OPEGA's office from 10:00 a.m. to

4:00 p.m. for legislators, non-partisan legislative staff, and invited guests from the Executive and Judicial Branch and the media.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Legislator Interest Surveys

The Director related that she has received 22 surveys back from individual legislators at this time and doesn't expect many more. She informed the Committee that she did receive three individual surveys from the State and Local Government Joint Standing Committee expressing an interest in 10 different areas. Director Ashcroft provided the Committee with a summary of these areas.

Potential Evaluation Topics and Scope Areas

Director Ashcroft reviewed with the Committee the status of potential evaluation topics that had been considered by the GOC at its March 25, 2005 meeting.

Rep. Trahan expressed how impressed he is that OPEGA's small staff has been able to produce so much work in such a short time. He mentioned he had learned a great deal from the information provided in OPEGA's scope statements.

A discussion ensued regarding Dirigo Health. Rep. Collins asked if Dirigo Health has a budget and what their expenditures are to date. He was also interested in how successful the program has been so far. Rep. Trahan mentioned a status report generating from Director Riley's office that might be helpful to the Committee. Director Ashcroft said she would try to get a copy of the report for the Committee's perusal. In regards to a suggestion that Director Riley attend a Committee meeting to answer questions, Director Ashcroft advised that calling Commissioners/Directors in for Committee questioning may set a precedent that is contrary to the approach OPEGA and the Committee would like to take. Committee members agreed.

Rep. Dugay then suggested that Director Ashcroft walk the Committee through the scope documents.

After discussion regarding the Information Systems Scope Statement:

Motion: That the Information Systems topic be moved to the On-Deck list. (Motion by Rep. Trahan, second by Rep. O'Brien, unanimous.)

A lengthy discussion ensued related to the Vacant Positions Scope Statement. Director Ashcroft advised the Committee that the analysis included in the scope statement is a point in time analysis based on approved positions. Several other concerns were voiced by

Committee members, such as status of temporary positions, what is done with grant money coming into the State related to positions, and using money allocated for positions as a budget balancing mechanism.

Motion: That the Vacant Positions issue be moved to the On-Deck list. (Motion by Rep. Trahan, second by Sen. Courtney, unanimous.)

The Economic Development Programs Scope Statement was then thoroughly discussed by the Committee. After the discussion:

Motion: That the Economic Development Programs topic be tabled indefinitely. (Motion by Rep. Trahan, second by Sen. Courtney, unanimous.)

The Child Mental Health Services Scope Statement was discussed next. Discussion centered on what the OPEGA evaluation might encompass. Rep. Dugay mentioned he would still like Spurwink scoped separately and Director Ashcroft stated OPEGA could certainly do that.

Motion: That the Child Mental Health Services topic be moved to the On-Deck list. (Motion by Rep. Canavan, second by Rep. Crosthwaite, unanimous.)

Director Ashcroft advised that three topics had not been scoped: DHHS Payments to Medicare Providers, University of Maine System, and Spurwink.

Next, the Committee spoke about an editorial from the Bangor Daily News that was handed out at the beginning of the meeting. The editorial was titled “Remaking DHHS” and referred to a recent report from the federal inspector general of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concluding that between 2000 and 2003, the state claimed adoption assistance money for 403 children who did not meet the federal criteria. The report claimed that about \$4.2 million was “over claimed”.

Rep. Dugay indicated his concern about the disposition of the 403 children who did not meet the criteria. Rep. Trahan expressed concern that the state was not always aware when a federal investigation was occurring. He suggested the Committee should approach the State and Local Government Joint Standing Committee about initiating legislation requiring agencies to notify OPEGA when a federal review is underway.

Motion: That the DHHS situation regarding the “over claims” of federal adoption assistance be scoped as a possible Rapid Response review. (Motion by Sen. Raye, second by Sen. Courtney, unanimous.)

NEW BUSINESS

Director Ashcroft also reported that OPEGA was ready to get started on an evaluation and recommended initiating both the Guardian Ad Litem Program review and initiating the development of an RFP for the Information Systems evaluation.

Motion: That the Committee adopt Director Ashcroft's recommendation to initiate an RFP for Information Systems and to evaluate the Guardian Ad Litem Program as previously scoped. (Motion by Sen. Courtney, second by Rep. Trahan, unanimous.)

The Committee discussed how best to notify the agencies involved about the upcoming evaluations. Director Ashcroft will notify them by e-mail in the morning. The Committee also asked the Director to draft a press release describing OPEGA's plans.

Rep. Trahan expressed his excitement about OPEGA finally beginning its first evaluations after such a long haul. He wanted to go on record as thanking former legislators Pendleton, Dunlap and Youngblood for their efforts in establishing OPEGA.

SCHEDULE NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 16, 2005 at 4:00 pm in the Labor Committee Room. However, the Committee discussed initiating a brief meeting early in the week of May 9th to discuss the results of OPEGA's scoping work on the potential Rapid Response item.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.