



State Employees Deserve Clear Whistleblower Protections

Cultivating a Broad Culture of Transparency

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State employees are one of Vermont's most valuable resources. More than 7,000 non-exempt employees serve Vermont's citizenry each and every day. These hard working men and women are on the front lines, keeping our state government running as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

Campaign for Vermont supports a proposal being promoted by Vermont State Auditor Doug Hoffer and the Vermont State Employees Association to strengthen whistleblower protections for state employees.

State employees should not be subject to the fear of retaliation or "labeling" as a result of serving the public good. Certainly, pointing out inefficiencies and potentially unscrupulous behavior in state government constitutes a public good.

Some have suggested that adequate legal protections for public employees who engage in whistleblowing currently exist today. Campaign for Vermont believes there should be no ambiguity. State employees are much less likely to report inefficiencies or unscrupulous behavior without clear protection.

The question before the legislature is not whether there are protections in place, but whether or not the protections are adequate. The de-facto reality is that fear of retaliation results in the inability of state employees to best serve the public good.

The Attorney General's office suggests that keeping a person's identity secure is not practical and the judicial system provides protections for whistleblowers. Campaign for Vermont believes this is an unacceptable and expensive means by which to achieve transparency. If a state employee wishes to keep their identity confidential there should be a means by which to do so. This helps to safeguard them against repercussions both by their supervisors and from being labeled as a whistleblower. The legal process is long, expensive, and never offer an assured outcome. Resolution through a time consuming and expensive judicial process will discourage state employees from coming forward. Accessibility is not the same as transparency.

An independent ethics commission as proposed by Campaign for Vermont in [Achieving Vermont Ethics Standards and Accountability in Government](#) would serve as a place for state employees to turn if there are concerns about inappropriate conduct. Vermont is a forward thinking state that likes to be on the leading edge. Why then, should we be content with being close to last in the nation in transparency, accountability and enforceable ethics policies?

Whistleblowing is essential to creating an accountable government. We should compel state employees to right a wrong when they see one; by giving them clear protection, citizens will benefit by broadening our culture of transparency.

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