



Testimony of Jerry Cantrell, Pres. NJ Taxpayers Association,

before the New Jersey Senate Government Committee

January 4, 2010

Response to S-445 (Pennacchio/Codey) - "Transparency in Government Act;" for establishment of a State Public Finance Website

Chairman Scutari and distinguished members of the Senate Government Committee:

My name is Jerry Cantrell and I am President of the NJ Taxpayer's Association, and Alliance, a statewide grassroots, non-partisan, organization dedicated to achieving real and sustainable tax reform in NJ.

As such we offer advice and ideas to cut costs while maintaining adequate service to taxpayers by becoming more efficient and effective.

Today I would like to provide the committee with an overview of our efforts and, since one of the agenda highlights is transparency, offer our ideas on how to save taxpayers' moneys at the same time improving the quality of life here in the Garden State.

We all feel better when we feel informed. As with our bank accounts, investments and credit data, that confidence comes from real-time access to pertinent financial information. Given current technology there really is no excuse for a lack of similar availability in a state like New Jersey regarding the expenditure of billions of tax dollars annually.

Today you are considering such a Bill (S-445), sponsored by Senators Pennacchio and Codey, which if enacted will create a very sensible solution to the question, "Where are our tax dollars being spent?"

Initially put forth in May 2008, the bi-partisan sponsored effort has languished in the shadows of the political realities that those of you in elected office must face.

Meanwhile a dozen other states have moved ahead and created state Transparency portals that shine a light on state government, while we in NJ sit in the dark. The cost of these sites has ranged from as low as \$20,000 to as high as \$310,000 (Please refer to attached Nov. 2009, Sunshine Review Report). In an era when we are faced with astronomical financial challenges

we view this initiative as an investment with a huge return in terms of taxpayer dollar savings.

State Comptroller, Matthew Boxer, testified at this past year's Budget hearings (May 2009), that the governor had directed him to build a Transparency portal. Mr Boxer further testified that this project was underway, would be completed with internal Information Technology personnel, would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, not millions, and would take 3 to 6 months to complete. However, a recent inquiry by NJTA indicates the project remains to lack a date for completion and implementation.

So, by all standards your approval of S-445 should simply provide the impetus to finally bring forth the solution promised. And since the efforts should be reaching completion, the dollars required are already expended, so it isn't even a question of additional expenditures.

It is time for a real vote exhibiting the political courage we hear so much about. And when it occurs we will be happy to applaud all of you.

Alternatively we will craft our own initiative and collectively press for its passage in the coming months.

Allow me to state in closing that we the citizens/taxpayers are tired of being helplessly in the dark relative to how and where our tax dollars are being expended and this proposed Bill will provide a starting point for a better informed citizenry.

Attached to my testimony are overviews of the NJ Taxpayers Association and Alliance along with both organizations' platform initiatives.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jerry Cantrell, President
New Jersey Taxpayers Association/Alliance
2 Berry Lane
Randolph, NJ 07869
973 927 9860

Attachments:

- Sunshine Review Report – Cost of state transparency websites,
 - http://sunshinereview.org/index.php/Press_Room
- Introduction to New Jersey Taxpayers' Association/Alliance,
- NJTA Brochure

