

Government Oversight Committee

Potential Alternatives for Enhancing Legislative Understanding and Oversight of OIT and IT matters

During the Government Oversight Committee's discussion of OPEGA's results and recommendations from its Follow Up Review of OIT, it was acknowledged that IT is a highly strategic area of State government that has huge implications on costs and efficiencies. IT is technically complex and ever-changing, costly, and critical to the State operations across all Departments and agencies. There was, therefore, concern among GOC members about whether the background of members typically assigned to the S&LG included those with relevant expertise and experience to effectively understand, oversee, question and support, as appropriate, the State's information technology risks, strategies and action plans. Similarly, there was concern about whether S&LG's workload during session, particularly given the broad array of subject matter covered by S&LG, allowed for sufficient time and focus on complex IT matters.

GOC members also noted the challenges all policy committees had faced in the past two years in trying to understand OIT's finances and budget because of the significant cost impact IT was having on agency budgets. OPEGA's Director Ashcroft shared that, during OPEGA's review of OIT, it became obvious that it is very difficult for OIT to communicate with the Legislature and legislative committees about IT issues. First because it touches every agency so it is a subject that is in front of every committee. Second because a lot of the IT issues are complex and require some amount of technical awareness to be able to get into the details and ask the right questions of OIT as well as to understand OIT's explanations. Director Ashcroft believed these communication challenges contributed to the repeat issues that showed up in OPEGA's Follow-Up report ten years after the original 2006 review.

The GOC decided to bring these concerns to the attention of the Legislative Council and suggest possible alternatives for supporting sufficient legislative understanding and effective, efficient legislative oversight of OIT and IT matters. The alternatives discussed included:

- ensure the S&LG Committee includes legislators with IT expertise and experience;
- establish a new legislative committee, or possibly a committee that also includes non-legislators with relevant backgrounds, and assign it jurisdiction over only OIT and IT matters; and
- establish a subcommittee, from among the existing policy committees, with members who have a background and interest in information technology and assign jurisdiction over OIT and information technology matters to that subcommittee.