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State Civil Service Commission Testimony By Marwan Kreidie Former Chairman of the State Civil Service Commission

It was my pleasure to have served as Chairman of the State Civil Service Commission and I am here to talk about the new regulations and threats to Merit based employment in the Commonwealth of PA.

To understand this threat one must first understand that the State Civil Service Commission is the first line of defense against the ravages of political corruption and nepotism that seem to be the norm rather than the exception in Pennsylvania. One only needs to google political corruption and the number of articles on Pennsylvania fills the screen. I have an article from Brad Bumsted of the Tribune, printed on Aug. 2, 2015 entitled "Pa., Breeding Ground for Corruption, experts say." Obviously this is not a stand-alone article and I could have printed out dozens more.

Let us just examine some highlights from the last decade or so.

All Philadelphia Traffic Courts Judges were removed from their positions for corruption and the Traffic Court abolished. In Wilkes Barre, President Judge Mark Ciavarella and Senior Judge Michael Conahan sold kids to Juvenile facilities. Two of our former Attorney Generals, Ernie Preate and Kathleen Kane had to resign from their positions and our State Treasurer Rob McCord had to resign as well. I cannot keep an accurate count of the number of state legislators who had to resign or go to jail but it is at least a dozen. I could go on and one with Mayors, Congress people and local DA's—all under indictment, who resigned or served time in jail.

This systemic corruption is not only rampant with elected officials. Whole agencies are also affected, We have serious issues within the Turnpike Commission and locally in Philadelphia one of the most recent examples is the Philadelphia Parking Authority whose former Executive Director's main occupation seems to have been granting large raises for himself and his executives and sexually harassing women on his staff. In fact I wrote an op/ed for the Philadelphia Inquirer published on Nov. 9, 2016 in which I recommended that to effect change and reform, the Philadelphia Parking Authority should become a Civil Service Agency. The latest news out of the PPA is that the new Executive Director who was supposed to reform the agency just hired her daughter's roommate for a managerial position.

One thing that all of these agencies and individuals had in common is that they occur in Non-Civil Service agencies. Having a true Merit system would be a significant barrier to these corruption shenanigans endemic to patronage agencies. Merit system agencies do not hire on the basis of who you know or what party you are in. Employees are not dependent on their political patrons and do not cower or fear their leadership so as to cover for them. Can you imagine the various corruption scandals that would have occurred in our Commonwealth if 70% of all jobs in our state were not covered by the SCSC?

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Civil Service is also good for Veterans—In studies that I have done in the past—and am currently doing, agencies that are non-civil service have significantly lower rates of veteran hiring. (Hiring preferences for Veterans should happen regardless of whether an agency is merit based or not.) I am currently doing a study on those counties with pass through funded jobs which were historically part of the State Civil Service Commission. These Counties have opted to have “local merit systems” rather than be part of the State Civil Service system. While I have not finished this study the required yearly compliance audits have for the most part not been done or done in such a fashion as to make them useless. One way to examine them for adherence to Merit system rules is to look at their rate of veteran hiring. The percentages of Veterans being hired is virtually zero where previously when they operated under the state Civil Service System it was over 10%. Again, without proper audits we cannot be sure that the people being hired are qualified or hired and promoted based on merit. From my early analysis most of them appear to be in essence at will agencies at best and patronage havens at worst.

In regards to reform and change, I think it is important that not only is a Merit system important to protect against nepotism and corruption it also has to be efficient and forward looking. I was proud that when I was Chairman and I assume today as well, the State Civil Service Commission out performed the non-civil service system—and this study was conducted by the Office of Administration—the non-civil service arm of the state.

In closing: I have read some of the comments that are posted on the Independent Regulatory Review Commission website; they seem to be eerily similar as though someone gave these agencies the same sample letter to use. These similar, almost word for word recommendations make me think that there is a concerted effort to squash these regulations. These recommendations that these agencies request go against the spirit of a real Merit system. If they really wanted to improve the system and make it easier for employees to apply and get jobs they should recommend increasing the Civil Service complement and reopening the Allentown testing center.

In conclusion, what we need to do is strengthen not weaken the State Civil Service system and regulations. Thus, I support the regulations as proposed and find them to be fair and workable.