


Testimony on Senate File 856 before Minnesota Senate Committee of State and Local Government
February 11, 2025 by Rich Neumeister 

Senate File 856 is a good beginning to start the discussion how the state of Minnesota can be more effective in overseeing its ever growing and expanding programs. But as with any proposal there must be questions answered and flushed out if the author's intentions are to come to fruition. There must be key elements that should be included or kept in mind to ensure effectiveness, clarity, and synergy.

My written testimony and presentation before the committee is to generally highlight those concerns and issues of the Office of Inspector General proposal (OIG)

In Minnesota, currently, we have the Legislative Auditor (OLA), an elected state auditor, and three inspector generals in three state agencies. So how will the roles of the entities so stated change with the bill. Will primary roles change or lessen? What will their role delineation be in their appropriate state statutes? Will the function of the IG be complimentary with the others?

What about jurisdiction and scope? How will it be different? Will there be shared exclusions or shared jurisdictions with the Legislative Auditor? Does the IG have sufficient access to information across all state agencies to perform similar to or more than the OLA.

Language being proposed is not clear with accountable processes for appointing and potentially removing the IG to safeguard their independence. This could include bipartisan or multi-party approval for appointments. It can also be said there is not a clear and accountable process for how members of the Inspector General Advisory Council will be selected. Will applicants go through the Open Appointments process, Chapter 15?

Why is there a representative from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension on the Council? Under powers and duties paragraphs (6), (7), (8) needs clarity and preciseness. Too ambiguous.

The proposal lacks specific concepts for coordination between the other auditing entities currently in law and the OIG to share findings, insights, or to collaborate on convoluted investigations where both financial and operational integrity are at stake.

How will Minnesota legally and practically integrate inspector generals in an existing framework of overseers ensuring their roles enhance governance without redundancy or conflict?

Can the state of Minnesota effectively integrate a concept of OIG into the excellent work as done by the OLA into a well-established system of independent auditing, enhancing governance, accountability, and public trust?

There is a BIG BUT about this proposal. If the OIG is not accountable, in 'sunshine' with the public and media to be overseen and watched by them to see what they do, all this will be for naught. It will be the same old, same old!

There must be clear complying with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (Chapter 13) and the Open Meeting Law (Chapter 13D) Doing so –

Fosters public trust and accountability in its operations. When government data is public as allowed by law, Minnesotans can see that there's an active instrument securing government entities functioning correctly. Public disclosure of audits and investigations will hold the OIG and the entities they work on accountable for their actions. Knowing that their activities will be scrutinized can deter misconduct.

Public government data allow other government agencies or private entities to learn from the mistakes or successes so stated in OIG reports and investigations. Can lead to improved practices across various sectors. Policy making can be enhanced significantly by letting legislators and the public know about systemic issues and concerns that need a legislative or administrative fix.

Knowing that investigations and reports become public does and can deter potential misconduct. It serves as a disincentive for future unethical behavior and misconduct. When public safety or significant financial blunder happens, the public has a right to know how their safety or tax money was handled. Awareness of risks is important. Where public health or welfare, like in the mismanagement of funds for social services as we have seen in our state for the last past months, public government data can lead to prompt and actual action or public clamor for change.

An informed public is crucial for public support for its institutions. Access to public government data can entrust the public to engage more completely with government processes. Journalists and watchdog organizations can use public government data to make government entities more answerable and liable to the public. Having public government data from reports and the finished investigations by exposing fraud and inefficiencies can lead to better appropriation of resources, potentially saving taxpayers money.

There are also needs to be consideration for the integrity of the investigations and reports. There must be a way where government data is made public in a manner that respects privacy and the investigative process while balancing the accountability and right to know. (sunshine)

Looking forward to discussing more the dynamics that can be put in place with current law and possible suggestions to have an effective framework as the legislation progresses.