



CGA Government Administration And Elections Committee  
February 28, 2007 Public Hearing

Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director  
Comments On:

HB 5989 AAC The Process for Issuance of Absentee Ballots

HB 6251 AA Authorizing Election Day Registration

SB 1311 AAC The Integrity and Security of the Voting Process

HB 7259 AA Establishing New Procedures to  
Implement the Mark Sense System

HB 5300 AAC Late Mail-In Voter Registration Applications

SB 1312 AAC Certain Compensation of Registrars of Voters

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My name is Christine Horrigan. I am Government Director for the League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2400 members dedicating to improving the electoral process and encouraging the active participation of citizens in government. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank you for giving the League the opportunity to comment upon a number of bills currently before the committee.

**HB 5989 AAC The Process for Issuance of Absentee Ballots**

In 2005, Public Act 05-235 was passed which created new requirements for the distribution of applications for absentee ballots. Among other things, the law requires anyone who distributes more than 5 absentee ballot applications to pre-register with the appropriate town clerk and to maintain and file a list of the people who receive applications. The purpose of the law is to prevent fraud in the absentee ballot process.

The League believes that these requirements have a chilling effect on efforts to encourage voter participation and that the appropriate method of discouraging voter fraud is through the application of civil and criminal penalties. Following passage of the law, the state League instructed local leagues to cease distributing applications for absentee

ballots in connection with their voter registration efforts due to concerns that local leagues, which have limited resources, might inadvertently run afoul of the law and find themselves subject to penalties. Currently, the League will provide information only as to where absentee ballot applications may be obtained, such as town clerks' offices. This places an additional, unnecessary burden on newly registered voters who wish to vote by absentee ballot and discourages voter participation.

The League is aware of the concerns regarding fraud in the absentee ballot area, but believes that any statute must be narrowly drawn so as not to discourage voter participation. While HB 5989 would eliminate the requirement of pre-registering with the town clerk, the League would like to see the bill go further and either eliminate the requirement of maintaining and filing a list of the people who receive absentee ballot applications or, in the alternative, contain an exception for non-partisan, non-profit organizations engaged in voter education and/or voter registration activities.

### **HB 6251 AA Authorizing Election Day Registration**

The League is a long time proponent of Election Day Registration for all federal, state and local elections. States with Election Day Registration have voter turnout rates that are 8 to 15% higher than the national average, with little voter fraud. In particular, Election Day Registration encourages first time voters, young people and new residents to cast their votes.

With the centralized voter registry system up and running, it is technologically possible for Connecticut to implement Election Day Registration. Election Day Registration reduces the need for provisional ballots, which often go uncounted, and ensures citizens that their votes will count. For these reasons, the League strongly supports HB 6251.

### **SB 1311 AAC The Integrity and Security of the Voting Process**

The League supports implementation of voting systems that are secure, accurate, recountable and accessible (SARA) in order to ensure the integrity of, and voter confidence in, elections. In 2005, believing that the state would adopt direct recording electronic (DRE) machines, the League advocated for voter verified paper trails for all DREs. The legislation which passed contained an elaborate audit mechanism.

As the Committee knows, the voting technology that was ultimately selected was not a DRE, but an optical scan machine. Currently, there are no post-election audit requirements for these machines. SB 1311 seeks to remedy that situation.

The League strongly supports mandatory, random audits for all voting machines and applauds the Secretary of the State for her willingness to embrace the concept and her leadership on this issue. However, we believe that SB 1311 as currently drafted does not go far enough in ensuring the integrity of our elections. We have been in discussions with the Secretary of the State's office regarding our concerns and together agree that:

1. The audit requirement should apply to all federal, state and municipal elections;
2. The audit requirement should apply to primaries as well as elections;
3. All races on the ballot in the selected district should be subject to the audit;
4. The legislation should state unequivocally that the paper ballot filled out by the elector is the official record of the elector's vote and that where a discrepancy occurs between the machine vote count and a manual tally or audit, the latter controls; and
5. When a recanvass is required or ordered, a manual tally of the paper ballots should be conducted, with the paper ballot treated as the official record of each vote and the results certified accordingly. Merely running the paper ballots through the machine a second time is not sufficient.

The League believes that these five requirements should be spelled out in the final bill. With these additions, the League supports SB 1311.

#### **HB 7259 AA Establishing New Procedures to Implement the Mark Sense System**

With one exception, Section 5 of HB 7259 requires registrars of voters to be in their offices on Election Day where they have access to the centralized voter registry system and are accessible to calls from other towns. This ensures that registrars are in a position to quickly research records and take steps necessary to protect an individual's right to vote. Where a town has only one voting district, the registrars may be in the polling place, but must be available by telephone and notify all registrars of voters' offices state-wide of that number, have an active connection to the state-wide computerized registry list and have all voter card files in the polling place for reference. The League supports these requirements as a means of protecting voters from being disenfranchised.

#### **HB 5300 AAC Late Mail-In Voter Registration Applications**

As noted above, the League is a long-time supporter of Election Day Registration. EDR passed the legislature several years ago, only to be vetoed by then Governor Rowland. Two years ago, in an apparent compromise, the last day to register to vote in person was reduced from 14 days to 7 days. However, the deadline for registrations delivered or mailed remained 14 days before the election. HB 5300 would allow registrars of voters to notify an applicant of the effect of an application which is late and any applicable deadline for applying in person, thereby eliminating any potential confusion on the part of the applicant. Consistent with our mission to open the political process to all citizens, the League supports the bill.

**SB 1312 AAC Certain Compensation of Registrars of Voters**

The League supports adequate training and compensation for registrars of voters. Current law provides that each registrar shall be compensated for attending two conferences called by the Secretary of the State for the purpose of discussing election laws and procedures at the artificially low rate of \$35 per day. The League supports a change in the law to compensate registrars at their usual salary rates for attendance at such conferences, plus expenses.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to voice our support for these bills and looks forward to working with you to ensure their passage.