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**Testimony of Andy Sauer**  
**Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut**  
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

**Friday, February 29, 2008**

Good morning. My name is Andy Sauer, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut is nonpartisan, nonprofit citizens' lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. We have more than 5,000 members in Connecticut.

We would like to thank the co-chairs of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, Rep. Chris Caruso and Sen. Gayle Slossberg, and the members of the committee for holding a public hearing on ethics and campaign finance reform, two subjects that Connecticut Common Cause considers vital to democracy.

Connecticut Common Cause supports the following legislative proposals:

- S.B.444 — An Act Concerning Certain Revisions And Technical Changes To The Election Laws
- S.B.448 — An Act Concerning Probate Judges
- H.J.21 — Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow Seventeen-Year-Old Persons Who Will Be Eighteen Years of Age at the Next Regular Election to Vote in Primaries Related to Such Election
- H.B.5664 — An Act Concerning The Filling Of Vacancies For Certain Chief Elected Officials Of Municipalities
- H.B.5029 — An Act Concerning The Ethics Code For Government Officials
- H.B.5662 — An Act Concerning an Agreement Among the States to elect the President of the United States by National Popular Vote
- H.B. 5663 — An Act Concerning United States Senate Vacancies

Connecticut Common Cause opposes the following legislative proposals:

- H.B.5665 — An Act Concerning Changes to the Conduct of Elections and Certain Compensation of Registrars Of Voters.

**H.B.5662 — An Act Concerning an Agreement Among the States to elect the President of the United States by National Popular Vote**

Connecticut Common Cause supports House Bill 5662, which would have Connecticut join other states to have the United States presidency decided by popular vote. Because of its small number of Electoral College votes, Connecticut has become somewhat irrelevant in presidential politics, as candidates choose to spend their limited time and resources in states with a greater number of Electoral College votes. By passing this bill Connecticut would not create a separate way of distributing Electoral College votes, as Maine and Nebraska do. A national popular vote law, if enacted, would only take effect if the identical law is passed in states that collectively total at least 270 Electoral College votes.

The current system for electing our president no longer serves our nation well. The state-by-state method for choosing presidential electors divides the country into so-called "safe" states where voters are all but ignored while the election is determined by a relatively small number of swing voters in "battleground" states. Four times in our history — 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000, the person who became president was someone who lost the popular vote.

Our country has drastically evolved since the creation of the Electoral College more than 200 years ago. At the time the founders of our nation established the method to select its chief elected officer, the United States was a federation of smaller states with power decentralized. Today, the federal government has a larger, centralized role with control over a vast array of services – from highways to revenue collections. It seems illogical that one person’s vote would count more than another’s when determining a leader with so much influence in the day-to-day lives of Americans.

Nationally, Common Cause supports changing the Electoral College’s current allocation system to one where states agree to cast their electoral votes for the candidate who wins the national popular vote. The United States Constitution gives each state the authority to choose its own system for picking electors. When candidates compete to win the national popular vote, every voter will be important. Presidential candidates will no longer be able to ignore most of us and will instead be accountable to the entire country.

### **H.B.5665 — An Act Concerning Changes to the Conduct of Elections and Certain Compensation of Registrars Of Voters.**

Although Connecticut Common Cause recognizes the need for some statutory changes in the responsibilities of municipalities’ registrars of voters and the manner in which they meet those responsibilities, we believe a more comprehensive change is required.

Registrars of voters are charged, among other things, with keeping the list of registered voters. Though seemingly simple and straightforward, this duty is vital to the integrity of elections. Such a position of importance to the electoral process must be above reproach and free of any suspicions of impropriety and favoritism. Since the very selection of a registrar is political – that is, it is an elected position, its impartiality can be put into question. How can any individual execute their duties impartially when the very people who select them have a vested interest in the decisions they make? In several municipal primaries in 2007, the conduct of registrars was questioned. While no impropriety has been found, the very suspicion of impropriety raises questions of whether one in a partisan and elected position can perform their duties free of political pressure.

*“Elections are contests for power and, as such, it is natural that politics will influence every part of the contest, including the administration of elections. In recent years, some partisan election officials have played roles that have weakened public confidence in the electoral process.”*

**“Building Confidence in U.S. Elections” by the Commission on Federal Election Reform, chaired by former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of the State James Baker**

In “Building Confidence in U.S. Elections,” otherwise known as the Carter-Baker report, the Commission on Federal Election Reform recommends the de-politicization of election administration positions. Registrars of voters are partisan elected officials, and Connecticut Common Cause believes it is time to depoliticize their position.

Connecticut Common Cause recommends amending HB 5665 to make the position of registrars of voters a state employee position that would fall under the Secretary of the State’s Elections Division. By making the position a state position, it would no longer be an elected position subject to the influences and pressures of local political officials. Additionally, many of the administrative concerns and evolving responsibilities could be addressed centrally by the Secretary of the State’s Election Division rather than piecemeal by recommendations and procedures that currently filter down from the state to registrars of voters.