Testimony before the GAE Committee
February 27, 2008
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Unlike East Haven, Cheshire has not gone through the recanvass process, nor have we been audited, but there are situations that affect all of us. The most critical is the Internet connection between all the registrars' offices. It habitually collapses under the weight of the information we exchange and it happens regularly when our offices are all preparing for an election simultaneously. This past February 5 primary's collapse was exacerbated by the fact that the only IT person in the Secretary of the State's office was on vacation for the February 4 – 8 week.

There is always a period of adjustment when changes are made, but we have been able to move forward relatively easily as we adopt the optical scanner form of voter tabulation. Dialog with the Secretary of the State's office has helped both us and them adapt to new situations and develop new procedures.

There are, however, some aspects of this new system that have not been fully addressed. One of them is the IVS (Independent Voting System) which is supposed to enhance the ability of someone who has trouble seeing or hearing to vote independently. Originally, we were told it would be used only in federal elections. It was introduced in the 2006 election because the optical scanners were not yet available throughout the state, and a stopgap measure had to be put into place so Connecticut would be perceived as making headway toward compliance with the Help America Vote Act. It has been touted as "Vote by Phone," and it is not very successful. Because it takes longer to use, and people with disabilities have other options that they always had in the past, it has not been used at all in Cheshire. I understand that is true in most communities. Imagine our dismay that the company in Texas that is the clearinghouse for this machinery sent us a bill for $800 for their services during the municipal election. This is just one of the hidden costs or unfunded mandates that will be hitting our communities' financial resources in successive elections.

Once the five elections promised to be underwritten by the vendor of the optical scanner are used up, each of our 169 towns will be paying a minimum of 35 cents a page (and probably more) for the paper ballots. If we were ordering 10,000 ballots, the printing bill would be $3,500. (Cheshire's bill would be $7,000 or more. The state's cities which have the largest populations will have a much larger bill.) Each election after the first five will cost each town over $300 to reprogram the memory cards used in the LHS/Diebold (recently renamed Premier Elections Solutions) optical scanners. That's not a lot of money, except that those towns which have referenda as well as general elections will be spending quite a lot more. We recently learned that the memory cards are property of the vendor, and we are expected to return them after each election. If the company decides the cost of reprogramming needs to be raised, cities and towns are at their mercy.

We appreciate that this hearing was held closer to home, and thank you for your attention to our concerns.