

Testimony before the GAE Committee
February 27, 2008
Betsy Adams, Cheshire Registrar of Voters

On June 26, 2007, Gov. Rell, under the guidance of the Secretary of the State, signed into law the moving of the Presidential Primary from March 4, 2008 to February 5, 2008. As a Registrar of Voters, I feel that the Secretary of the State should have had an open discussion beforehand regarding this move and its implications for those of us who actually run the polls. That did not happen. Instead, after doing our referendum and November election we went full swing into the Presidential Primary.

Moving the date of the primary had many direct effects on those running it. Cheshire's initial idea was to have one central polling location. With only 50% of our registered voters eligible to vote in the primary, we hoped for some flexibility that would enable us to address unprecedented issues caused by the new date. Under existing state law, we were denied this flexibility and unable to effectively address our concerns. These concerns included:

- Safety: It was a normal school day at Cheshire, with all schools in session. Normally our schools are in lock-down. This means that people are not allowed to simply enter a school at will. We don't need to remind anyone about the tragedy that struck Cheshire in July and we were concerned about weakening security safeguards.
- Parking issues would obviously be a problem, because all but one of our polling places are in schools. The state's change from March to February was decided upon after all local school calendars were already established.
- Weather: The unpredictability of February weather would have been less of an issue at one central location, where possible snow or ice in parking lots and on sidewalks might be more quickly and safely removed by available public works personnel in the event of a storm (road and traffic conditions being a related issue). This is important for the safety of our voters and poll workers alike.
- Poll workers: With the primary being moved from March to February, the pool of available poll workers to draw from was smaller. Many of our workers are senior citizens and go to live in Florida and warmer climates in February.
- The thousands of dollars that would be saved on staffing, moving expenses, etc. are another issue, which nonetheless requires notice at a time of increasingly hard-pressed municipal budgets.

I contacted many Registrars of Voters via e-mail about the running of this primary. Every response voiced similar concerns. One summed it up best: "Registrars didn't vote to move the Primary date to February 5th, so I think some compromises and accommodations should be made to make the primary run as smoothly and safely as possible for all concerned."

Whether after continued review we had decided on 1 or 2 or 3 voting locations, the decision should have been left to the Registrars of Voters. Given the evident lack of forethought at a state level about the practical consequences of moving a primary to a mid-winter date, local registrars would have benefited from being allowed the flexibility to implement the best election day options and plans. If we are truly the election officials for our communities, it must be accepted that we best know the specific needs and circumstances of our electors. Let us do the job they elected us to do.

Thank you for your time and your attention.

