



CGA Government Administration And Elections Committee  
February 29, 2008 Public Hearing

Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director

**Comments On:**

SB 444 AAC Certain Revisions and Technical Changes to the Election Laws  
SB 445 AAC Permanent Absentee Ballot Status  
SB 446 AAC Voters Who Change Party Affiliation  
HB 5029 AAC The Ethics Code for Government Officials

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The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a statewide organization with over 2300 members dedicated 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 us the opportunity to comment upon a number of bills currently before the Committee.

SB 444 AAC Certain Revisions and Technical Changes to the Election Laws

The League believes that the political process must be open to all citizens and the *right to vote with confidence* must be guaranteed. As noted in our testimony on the optical scan voting machines on February 25, 2008, the League believes that the most glaring deficiency in the rollout of the new voting technology has been the lack of consistency exhibited across the state. We support those provisions of SB 444 which seek to address this issue and provide greater accountability and quality control. Specifically, we support giving the Secretary of the State access to polling places on Election Day for purposes of reviewing compliance with state and federal law (Section 7), establishing guidelines for reporting certain information to the Secretary of the State (Sections 8(a) and 10), amending the Voter's Bill of Rights to include informing voters of the different voting options (Section 18) and adopting measures to address privacy issues in a consistent manner (Sections 22, 23 and 24). However, with respect to the last issue, we note that while Section 23 attempts to create a zone of privacy around the voting tabulator from encroachment by other voters, no attempt has been made to address the issue of the machine tenders standing too close to the machines – a frequent complaint of voters. We urge the Committee to look at whether this issue should also be addressed by statute or whether it is better left to regulation and procedure.

Finally, the League applauds extending the prohibition on transporting, preparing, repairing and maintaining a voting machine in C.G.S. §9-247a to business entities

affiliated with a candidate (Section 1). However, we would go further and prohibit a member of the immediate family of a candidate from serving as a moderator and a candidate for the office of registrar or a member of the immediate family of such candidate from serving as a voting machine mechanic. *See exceptions to C.G.S. §9-247a.*

#### SB 445 AAC Permanent Absentee Ballot Status

The League believes that voters who are unable to get the polls should not be disenfranchised because of difficulties applying for and receiving absentee ballots (including long lead times associated with the mails). This group includes people who are permanently disabled, infirm (shut-ins) or suffering from an illness (such as Parkinson's disease) that makes an appearance at the polls on any given day questionable. By eliminating the interim step of applying for the ballot, permanent absentee ballot status should also reduce paperwork and costs to municipalities.

Three of the bills before the Committee today (SB 444, SB 445 and HB 5665) would provide for the automatic mailing of absentee ballots to permanently disabled voters, but only one, *SB 445 AAC Permanent Absentee Ballot Status*, would extend that right to voters who are permanently unable to go to the polls on Election Day because of illness or infirmity. The League urges the Committee to protect these vulnerable voters by supporting SB 445.

#### SB 446 AAC Voters Who Change Party Affiliation

Currently, unaffiliated voters can register with a party up until noon of the day before the primary. Voters who move to a new town can switch parties when they register to vote and vote in a primary. However, voters who switch parties without moving during the three months preceding a primary cannot vote in the primary of either party. They are effectively disenfranchised for purposes of the primary, often unknowingly. SB 446 would remedy this situation by providing that an elector who transfers his enrollment to a new party would continue to be entitled to the privileges of his former party—including the right to vote in the primary of his former party—until the attachment of privileges in the new party. The League urges your support for this bill.

#### HB 5029 AAC The Ethics Code for Government Officials (Governor's Bill)

Earlier this week, the League testified in support of SB 333, *AAC Comprehensive Ethics Reform*. As noted at that time, the League believes that the public should have confidence in the integrity of its government and further, that government officials and employees should be held accountable for carrying out their duties in both an effective and ethically responsible manner.

*State Ethics Reform.* HB 5029 expands the classes of individuals who must file a statement of financial interest and the types of transactions which must be reported. The League believes that "sunshine is often the best disinfectant" and supports enhanced reporting requirements. In addition, we support timely posting of public agency minutes

on the agency's website, extending the crime of illegal practices to the chief of staff of the office of the Governor or chief of staff for any legislative caucus who solicits political contributions, and giving judicial authorities the option of pension revocation as a means of holding public officials and employees accountable. We recommend that the reporting requirements be applicable to all professional employees of both the legislative branch and the executive branch, and not just the legislative branch with a few exceptions as the bill currently proposes. Having said that, in the League's view, SB 333 (on which we submitted testimony on February 25, 2008) and HB 5029 have much in common and we recommend that the Committee consider combining the best elements of both bills into one unified proposal.

*Municipal Ethics Reform.* As part of its ethics position, the League supports actions to promote the establishment of municipal ethics commissions and municipal ethics codes as applied to municipal public officials, municipal public employees, and municipal lobbyists. The League supports the provisions of HB 5029 dealing with the adoption of municipal ethics codes and the establishment of a model code of ethics for municipalities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be heard on these bills. The League looks forward to working with you to ensure their passage.