

Testimony of Todd Vachon Before The CT Legislature:
Government Administration and Elections Committee
Regarding HB6436 and HB6441
Wednesday, February 18th, 2009

My name is Todd Eugene Vachon, I reside at 342 Westchester Rd. in Colchester CT. I am here today on this 18th day of February, 2009 to testify before the Government Administration and Elections Committee in support of HB6436 and HB6441.

The relevance of my testimony today stems from my recent experience as a write-in candidate for U.S. Congress in Connecticut's 2nd Congressional District in the election held November 4th, 2008.

This long and tiresome process began by seeking ballot access for Brian Moore for President and myself as the congressional candidate chosen to represent the Socialist Party, USA. After a couple months of burdensome paperwork, bureaucratic procedure and pounding the concrete with thousands of petition pages, we fell short of acquiring the exclusionary number of petition signatures required to appear on the ballot.

The Socialist Party then met and opted to continue the campaigns with write-in candidacies. We felt it was important to offer our supporters and other voters that are opposed to the two capitalist parties an alternative at the ballot. Knowing from the beginning that write-in candidates do not win elections, we decided that it was our right to vote for candidates of our choice regardless of the outcome. What we did not expect was that our votes would not be counted.

Immediately following the election we found that many towns were reporting ZERO write-in votes. Individual voters began contacting the campaign to complain that they had written in a vote for myself and/or Brian Moore for President, but their town was still showing "zero" votes for write-in candidates.

We contacted the Elections Division at the Secretary of State's Office and various individual town clerks to complain. As a result, some numbers changed, but many towns still did not reflect the proper number of votes. We contacted the CT Green Party to see if they had similar concerns with the number of votes received for Cynthia McKinney, their write-in candidate for President, and they said that they had.

In my case, having a very small and identifiable base, it was very easy for us to locate problems. For instance, my wife and I both voted in Colchester for Brian Moore and myself, but Colchester only reported one vote. My family's hometown of Salem showed zero write-in votes until we complained. The number was increased to 4, which was still 2 shy of the six voters that initially

complained that their vote was not counted... The story is similar for various other towns including Glastonbury, New London and Mansfield. These are all definite and identifiable discrepancies. They, however, say nothing of other potential counting errors involving voters that I do not personally know. Considering that literally half of the known votes cast for my campaign were not counted certainly opens ones mind to speculation about the potential likelihood of other errors.

We of course understand that this small number of votes will not effect the outcome of the election, but it does represent the disenfranchisement of at minimum, 12 voters, and that is in and of itself an injustice.

Leaving the past now and looking toward the future, what steps can be taken to alleviate these problems in upcoming election cycles?

First and foremost, our current ballot access laws are very prohibitive and wasteful. Countless hours and resources are expended in attempts to gain the extremely difficult goal of ballot access. Lowering the number of signatures required to get on the ballot would combat this problem while still requiring a political entity to show some public support before it may appear on the ballot. HB6436 does exactly this. This bill would reduce the required number of signatures for statewide and federal offices to 1,000, a number which is on par with our neighboring New England states of Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine. In addition to the provision in HB6436 to reduce the number of required signatures it might be worthy to consider allowing online petitioning in order to save paper, energy and time.

Opening the political process to more varied and diverse voices will definitely increase voter participation in our state by confronting the anti-democratic nature of a two-party duopoly which limits the scope of democracy; ultimately stifling any real progress. More options on the political menu can only enhance public discourse and increase democracy in our state and country.

Second, in addition to a more clear write-in voting and counting procedure, I feel that stronger oversight of voting integrity would solve some of the counting problems that my supporters have encountered.

HB6441 seeks to strengthen voting integrity in the state of Connecticut by implementing more oversight, stricter guidelines and enforceable rules. This bill will address many deficiencies in our current system by increasing accountability in three ways:

First, it would strengthen the accounting system by making a public record of actual election results. This is achieved by three simple steps:

- 1) It would require the entire Moderator's Return, checklist report, and optical scanner tape copy from each district to be faxed to the Secretary of the State's office.
- 2) The Secretary of the State would have to post all those document images on the web, indexed by town and date.

3) All data would be inputted at the same level of detail required on the Moderator's Returns and posted on the SOTS website in a downloadable format.

This procedure would allow anyone to check the documents vs. the data, see the actual results at any level of detail and search for anomalies. Furthermore, it would eliminate the need for three levels of transcription and addition late at night.

The second thing this bill does, which may help in circumstances such as mine, is to make the Secretary of the State's procedures enforceable; it would become possible to complain to the SEEC if your votes were not counted as required in the Moderator's Manual.

Finally, the third thing that this bill does is to improve the ballot chain-of-custody, making it more difficult for someone to tamper with ballots.

There are of course many other benefits to these pieces of legislation, but I want to keep my testimony relevant to my personal experience.

That being said, I'll conclude by reiterating that an expansion of the number and diversity of voices represented in the political arena can only enhance democracy, HB6436 would do this by giving minor parties a fighting chance to get on the ballot. Furthermore, increased oversight of the election and vote counting process to ensure the highest possible integrity of our voting process can only be a good thing. Anyone who agrees would likely support HB6441 and hope that you will.

Thank you for your time.

Todd Vachon
342 Westchester Rd
Colchester, CT 06415