



**Town of Fairfield** · Registrar of Voters Office  
611 Old Post Road, Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

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Testimony of Matthew Waggner, Registrar  
(203) 256-3115 | mwaggner@town.fairfield.ct.us

## **Testimony on HB 5022: An Act Increasing Penalties For Voter Intimidation And Interference**

Dear Co-Chairs Morin and Slossberg, Ranking Members Hwang and McLachlan, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

Thank you for taking up HB 5022, An Act Increasing Penalties for Voter Intimidation and Interference. I support this bill, and appreciate your recognition that voter intimidation deserves additional scrutiny as a distorting force in our election system. I don't know of any way to count the number of people who stay away from the polls because of fears associated with the behavior discussed in this bill, but there are routinely reports of those attempting to influence voters to stay away from the polls with misleading advice or threatening signage, and I hope that your efforts make enforcement of these matters a greater priority.

I would like to raise two points for you to consider as you work on this bill.

First, Section 4 discusses a window of time in which it is illegal to threaten or fire an employee or promise to hire a prospective employee in order to influence their vote – the sixty days before an election. I would respectfully submit that if it is illegal to threaten to fire someone on September 15th of an election year, then it should be equally illegal to do so on September 1st or November 30th. Please consider striking the window of time language to establish that employer intimidation of voters that work for them is always wrong.

Secondly, Section 3 discusses influencing the vote by bribery or corrupt means, and while it changes the penalty for these actions, it does not change the language defining them. It had come to my attention in 2010, when a campaign made an offer of free gifts to voters that came to their polling place, that SEEC staff did not feel the existing language gave them the authority to pursue the matter on their own. In that instance, as it was a federal office, the U.S. Department of Justice intervened, saying in part:

*Specifically, Section 1973i(c) of Title 42 of the United States Code makes it a federal offense to pay or offer to pay an individual a thing of value for voting. Violation of Section 1973i(c) is punishable by imprisonment for up to five years and a fine not to exceed \$250,000. Please note the Department's understanding that this statute prohibits a person from providing a thing of value — such as clothing — in return for an individual's participation in the voting process.*

There are less-publicized examples of local and state campaigns offering “things of value” to voters, such as gifts or meals at the polling place, and while at one time this was well-established practice in American elections, I believe there is now a consensus that this is inappropriate. I hope you will consider consulting with the SEEC to make Connecticut's vote-buying prohibitions on par with the federal statute.