

Testimony RE: HB 5024

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I am Aleta Looker, one of the Registrars of Voters in Cheshire, and I am in my eighth year in this position. I had spent the previous four years as the deputy registrar and have been one of the people who work very hard to preserve the integrity of the election process so you can represent me here in Hartford. Sad to say, there are very few registrars who have moved on to become legislators, so relatively few of you have a concept of what the job entails.

I want you to know that Election Day Voter Registration is a very bad idea, especially in this small, well populated, and highly transient state of Connecticut. It sounds grand as a concept but there are a lot of compelling reasons why it should not happen. I am here to tell you some of the most urgently important reasons.

1. Anyone who is a citizen of the United States of America has the right, indeed the privilege, to vote as long as he or she follows the rules set forth within the state in which they reside. The current law in Connecticut permits a citizen to register as young as age 17 (and vote in a primary prior to the general election if his or her birthday occurs on or before the date of the general election, and if the person has enrolled in a political party). Over the years, the laws have been relaxed over and over again, and now allow a person who cannot read to vote, and to register in person up to noon on the day before an election if they have just turned 18 or moved into a new town within the past week or just been naturalized. Even people held in prison prior to a trial may vote. And once a convicted felon has been released and served the terms of his or her parole, he or she may register to vote.
2. Having a half day to add names to the supplemental list of voters who may go to the polls the following day is enough of a burden to place on the registrars without further complicating their overly busy workday on Election Day.
3. Registration laws are so simple to follow and access to registration forms so easy, there is very little to prevent a person who really wants to vote from registering any day of the year simply by downloading a registration form from any computer. Forms are written in Spanish and English.
4. Registrars abide by published hours to be present in their offices throughout the year. They keep their offices open on prescribed and advertised Saturdays and late evenings to help people who work during regular office hours.
5. If a person knows he or she can procrastinate about registering until the day of Election, it encourages this counterproductive behavior. Chaos would result.
6. Certain civil servants in the Secretary of the State's office collect data regarding the number of eligible voters and want an exact accounting. Other civil servants within the same office want voting results as fast as possible before Election Day is over—or no later than the day afterwards. These demands are difficult to comply with under the best of conditions and would become extremely overwhelming if people could register and vote on Election Day.

7. There is potential for fraud in permitting Election Day registration, especially if the registrants take advantage of the proximity of neighboring states and travel from Connecticut over the line to Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island. There is no nation-wide computerized voting list. Connecticut does have a statewide system, but there is still the possibility of registering and voting in several towns or cities without being caught immediately.
8. A Registrar of Voters can explain to a would-be registrant that there are fines and potential imprisonment for people who falsely register. If there is a long line of people waiting to register on Election Day, however, this warning might be given short shrift.
9. Most towns are facing severely budgetary problems. We are concerned about the cost of having this extra registering/polling place, which would have to be manned at nearly the same level as an actual polling place and have computer and telephone installations. We are never given enough money, the state computer system is slow to be upgraded, and finding workers who are willing to deal with the grueling 14 plus hour day is difficult.
10. Is the possibility of getting more votes worth the risk of doing something illegal or unethical, especially if the voters in question have no particular interest in political issues and are only behaving like sheep?

When I came to this state 52 years ago, I had to wait to register until six months had passed, and when I finally was able to register, I had to prove I could read. Then I moved within the state and the same rules applied. In those days, registering and voting really meant something important. Now it has become as simple as waiting in line at McDonald's and the significance has been lost in the process.

My message is simple. Stop tinkering with the election process—at least until technology catches up—and take some time to appreciate what you already have.