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ROVAC Testimony on Raised Bill No. 5024

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AAC Voting Rights

Senator Slossberg, Representative Morin, and members of the GAE Committee. My name is Melissa Russell, and I'm a Registrar of Voters in Bethlehem, as well as the Executive Vice President of ROVAC. I'm speaking today about HB 5024.

This bill has two main components that affect Registrars which I'd like to address here today. The first is online voter registration, as laid out in Sec. 11 of this bill. ROVAC supports the concept of allowing individuals to register to vote online, provided equal checks and balances be implemented in an online system that are now in place in our current system. ROVAC looks forward to working with the Secretary of the State's office in implementing a system that will work smoothly and efficiently both for the voter and in our offices.

The second main component of this bill deals with Election Day Registration (EDR). As the Committee may be aware, our organization is deeply divided on this issue. The last time EDR came up for consideration, ROVAC took a vote at its 2010 Annual Meeting, with a result that a large majority of those voting were against any form of EDR.

The concerns Registrars have about EDR fall into three categories: cost, logistics, and integrity.

The first concern of our members is the cost of implementation. In this atmosphere of zero increase budgets each year for many of our offices, Registrars are concerned about hiring the extra manpower needed to process those registering on election day, the cost of purchasing and installing at least one extra computer that is hooked up to the physical router needed to operate CVRS (Centralizes Voter Registration System), and the cost of printing an extra set of election day ballots and envelopes.

The second concern of our members is the logistics of implementation. Registrars in large towns and cities may have difficulty in finding locations that are equipped with routers, phone lines, and the space needed by a large number of applicants coming to register. There is also the fairly long process of verifying with a previous municipality that an applicant has not already voted that day -- the registrar in the new town would have to call the registrar in the previous town, who would then have to call their moderator in the polling place where the voter had previously been eligible to vote, who would then have to interrupt the checker in order to check

the list to see if the voter had already cast a ballot. Then that information would have to be transmitted back to the registrar in the old town, who would then let the registrar in the applicant's new town know if the person had already voted. (Sec. 1-e-2-A) Even if no one's phone was busy, and everything went smoothly, this is a process that would take a considerable amount of time.

The third concern of Registrars has to do with the integrity of the election process. One of the most important safeguards our system has for verifying an individual's eligibility to vote, is the sending of a confirmation letter via the US Mail, to the registrant's home address. In the case where someone has not been truthful about their place of residence, the Post Office returns that piece of mail to Registrars as undeliverable. With the EDR process, the Registrars will have no way of knowing whether those who registered on election day actually reside at the place where they say they do, until well after their ballots are election results are in. In the case of many municipal and state races, a very few votes can make the difference as to who has won the election. Many of our members have grave concerns about this issue.

As you can see from my testimony today, this bill is a mixed bag for ROVAC, and many of our members have serious and valid concerns about EDR. It is my hope that you consider carefully the issues I have raised here when making the decision whether to pass this out of this committee. Thank you for your time and your patience.