



CITY OF HARTFORD
REGISTRAR OF VOTERS OFFICE

Democratic Registrar
Olga Iris Vázquez

Working Families Registrar
Urania Petit, MSW

Republican Registrar
Salvatore Bramante

March 1, 2012

Testimony of Urania Petit on HB 5024: An Act Concerning Voting Rights

Dear Chairpersons Slossberg and Morin and members of GAE,

Election Day Registration is a necessary tool for cities like Hartford to serve the needs of our community and democracy.

It has been stated that voting is our fundamental right, but in exercising that right we sometimes experience barriers, such as registration deadlines, hard-to-understand removal procedures, and requiring our citizens to appear at an office – the Registrar of Voters – that they might never have heard about. I consider voter education to be a major part of my job as a Registrar in Hartford, but I favor eliminating these barriers to voting when it will help our citizens exercise their rights more freely.

With voting comes responsibilities – but it is *our* responsibility to give our voters the right tools to deliver their votes. With every vote comes so much power, but when our residents get turned away from the polls for reasons they don't understand, it can make them feel powerless.

One thing that Hartford experiences is a very high transient population. It has been said that in the past 8 years, 70,000 of Hartford's 83,000 renters have moved at least once. Our office and non-profit advocates take steps to address this, including pursuing an ordinance for rental offices to have voter registration cards for new tenants. Because of how often residents move, I expect that Election Day Registration will be very popular in our city.

However, I am not sure what single public location we could possibly use for the large number of people that would want to register on Election Day. City Hall and Downtown areas have limited parking and require payment in meters. Our schools are open on Election Day, and their lots are already full with staff and faculty. And, as Secretary Merrill pointed out in her testimony on Monday, a large number of our residents simply do not drive. She said:

“However, eliminating certain polling places becomes problematic in cities where the neighborhood polling place is important because people can get there by foot. Eliminating a polling place in a city neighborhood can create voter confusion and place a hardship on a voter who does not have a car if he or she wants to exercise their right to vote.”

I agree, and would add that after attempting to vote at the neighborhood polling place and taking two or more bus trips to where the Registrars decide to allow EDR, it may be two, three, or more hours before they complete their vote and can return to home or work. This kind of experience would lead to discouragement and disenfranchisement for these voters. To be successful both for voters and for Registrars, and our town and city governments, I feel that Election Day Registration can and should be done at the polls.

Thank you for the chance to testify.