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SECRETARY OF THE STATE  
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**TESTIMONY OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE STATE JAMES SPALLONE ON  
SENATE BILL 437, "AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO ELECTION LAWS"**

**GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE**

**MARCH 21, 2012**

Senator Slossberg, Representative Morin and Members of the GAE Committee: On behalf of the Secretary of the State I would offer you the following comments regarding SB 437.

The Secretary has made instituting best practices for election administration and accountability to the public policy priorities. To that end, we recommend the language in Section 1. Registrars of Voters are unlike almost every other elected official in that their role has specific administrative responsibilities that are statutorily required. The only similar role would be the elected town clerks, and there has been a removal statute for them in our statutes for over 100 years (see C.G.S. 7-22).

The language in Section 1 basically tracks the language in Sec. 7-22, except that it places the role of receiving and investigating a Registrar complaint in the hands of the State Election Enforcement Commission. This is appropriate since the Registrars' functions are defined in the election laws of Title 9.

We should bear in mind that Registrars of Voters carry out duties that touch on citizens' right to vote and their expectation of fair elections. Unfortunately, if an individual registrar fails to fulfill their statutory duties there is no significant consequence that the Secretary of the State can impose under current law. Although this provision would be rarely used, the voters deserve to have some way to ensure basic accountability. After all, while the Registrars are elected officials, they are, as a practical matter, elected by their town committees, and not by the public in a general election.

Section 5 of the bill addresses absentee ballots. The absentee ballot management system is complicated and in the next several weeks the Secretary will be convening a working group to evaluate the current process. The goal of the group will be to streamline the system. This proposal, on the other hand, would take us in another direction by adding another layer to the process. We would urge the Committee to remove this section.

Regarding Section 6, the Secretary of the State supports efforts to offer training and professional development to Registrars and Clerks. However, we think that putting into statute

to one specific subject of training is unnecessary. The particular topic cited as required is the election results certified by the Town Clerk, and so it would be of little or no value to mandate such training to Registrars. The Secretary's staff regularly participates in the conferences of Registrars and Clerks, and would support such measures as increasing the per diem rate that the law currently mandates towns provide to support these training opportunities. We have also begun to develop online training modules. However, we would be concerned that specifying content of the agency's presentation would tie our hands and eliminate flexibility.

Thank you for considering our comments on SB 437.