

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 12-56—sHB 5024

*Government Administration and Elections Committee
Appropriations Committee*

AN ACT CONCERNING VOTING RIGHTS

SUMMARY: This act changes election laws affecting voter registration, voting, and the statewide centralized voter registration system (CVRS). Principally, it:

1. allows eligible people to register to vote and cast a ballot on Election Day (i.e., the day of a regular state or municipal election);
2. establishes Election Day registration (EDR) procedures;
3. eliminates the use of presidential ballots by current state residents since they may instead vote under the act's EDR provisions;
4. requires the secretary of the state to report to the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee on EDR administration;
5. requires the secretary to establish and maintain an online system for (a) new voter registration applications and (b) changes to existing registrations; and
6. authorizes the secretary to enter into an agreement with other states to share information or data that will help maintain Connecticut's CVRS.

The State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) is responsible for enforcing the act's EDR and online voter registration system provisions. Toward that end, the act requires the SEEC to investigate complaints alleging a violation of these provisions and authorizes it to levy a civil penalty of up to \$2,000 against violators. In addition, anyone who fraudulently votes or registers under its provisions is guilty of perjury.

The act also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2013, except the online voter registration system and SEEC enforcement provisions are effective January 1, 2014.

EDR

§§ 1 & 2 — Location and Officials

The act requires registrars of voters to designate a location for completing and processing EDR applications. The location must be one where registrars can access the statewide CVRS.

The act prohibits the same activities in or near the EDR location as the law prohibits in or near a polling place. This means no one can be within 75 feet of the entrance to the EDR location or in any hallway or other approach to it to solicit support for, or opposition to, a candidate or ballot question; loiter; peddle; or offer advertising material or circulars.

The act authorizes registrars to appoint election officials to serve at these

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locations and delegate to them any of their responsibilities. The registrars must train and supervise the officials.

§ 1 — Eligibility

The act permits anyone to register and vote in person on Election Day if he or she meets the eligibility requirements for voting in this state and is (1) not already an elector or (2) registered in one municipality but wants to change his or her registration because he or she currently resides in another municipality.

By law, a person is eligible to register and vote if he or she is (1) a U.S. citizen, (2) age 18 or older, and (3) a bona fide resident of the municipality in which he or she applies for admission as an elector. Mentally incompetent people cannot be admitted as electors, and people convicted of a felony and committed to the custody of the commissioner of correction forfeit their electoral rights while incarcerated.

§ 1 — Application Procedures and Identification Requirements

Under the act, applicants must appear in person at the designated EDR location and declare under oath that they have not previously voted in the election. They must complete the voter registration form and provide the same information the law requires from anyone seeking to become an elector in this state. This means they must provide their birth certificate, driver's license, or Social Security card. The act allows college and university students to instead present a current photo identification (ID) issued by their higher education institution.

Under the act, if an applicant's information does not include proof of residential address, he or she must also submit another form of ID showing the address. The additional ID may include a motor vehicle learner's permit; utility bill due no later than 30 days after the election; or, for a college or university student, a current college or university registration or fee statement.

§ 1 — Checking Eligibility

Registrars of voters must check the CVRS before admitting an applicant as an elector. If they determine an applicant is qualified to register and has not already voted, they must admit him or her. The person's electoral privileges attach immediately.

If the registrars determine that the applicant is registered in another municipality but he or she wants to change his or her registration location, they must immediately notify the registrars in the municipality where the applicant is currently registered and request that they remove the elector's name from their official registry list. The election officials in that municipality must cross through the elector's name on the list and mark "off" next to it. (Presumably, the applicant cannot vote in the new polling place if the registrars are unable to contact the registrars in the municipality where the applicant is currently registered.)

If the applicant has already voted in the other municipality, the registrars of

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that municipality must immediately notify the registrars of the municipality where the elector wants to register. The registrars must deny the applicant a ballot, cease the registration process, and review the matter. If the matter cannot be resolved on review, the registrars must report it to the SEEC for investigation.

§ 1 — Voting Procedures

Registrars of voters must give an EDR ballot and envelope to an applicant whom they admit as an elector and record its issuance. The elector must (1) declare under oath that he or she did not previously vote in the election and (2) sign an affirmation that is printed on the back of the security envelope and is substantially similar to the following:

AFFIRMATION: I, the undersigned, do hereby state, under penalty of false statement, (perjury) that:

1. I am the person admitted here as an elector in the town indicated.
2. I am eligible to vote in the election indicated for today in the town indicated.
3. The information on my voter registration card is correct and complete.
4. I reside at the address that I have given to the registrars of voters.
5. If previously registered at another location, I have provided such address to the registrars of voters and hereby request cancellation of such prior registration.
6. I have not voted in person or by absentee ballot and I will not vote otherwise than by this ballot at this election.
7. I completed an application for an Election Day registration ballot and received an Election Day registration ballot.

The newly admitted elector must secretly mark the ballot in the presence of the registrars, place it in the EDR envelope, and deposit the envelope in a secured EDR ballot depository receptacle.

§ 1 — Counting Procedures

Under the act, the law's procedures relating to the custody, control, and counting of absentee ballots must apply as nearly as possible to the custody, control, and counting of EDR ballots. Among other things, this means that at the time designated by registrars and noticed to election officials, registrars must transport the receptacle for ballot counting to the same area (district or central location) where absentee ballots are counted. It also means:

1. the election officials present at the location count the ballots;
2. a section of the head moderator's return must show the number of EDR ballots cast;
3. the registrars must seal a copy of the EDR vote tally in the depository envelope with the ballots and store the envelope with the other election results materials; and
4. the registrars must preserve the envelope for 180 days after the election, the same period of time the law requires other counted ballots to be preserved.

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§ 1 — Confirmation Procedures

Registrars of voters must immediately send a registration confirmation notice by first-class mail to the residential address of each EDR applicant they admit. The envelope must have instructions for returning any confirmation notice that cannot be delivered to the address shown. If the confirmation is returned as undelivered, the registrars must take other actions required by law to verify the address. However, they must take these actions immediately and cannot wait until the May 1st deadline that otherwise applies to verifying names on the registry. If the address cannot be verified, registrars must place the elector's name on the inactive list and remove it after four years, unless during this period the elector applies for restoration to the active list or votes.

§ 9 — Report

The secretary of the state must report to the GAE Committee by February 1, 2014 on any issues or concerns that arise during the November 2013 municipal election with respect to EDR administration, including ballot security and privacy. In consultation with the SEEC, the secretary must interview registrars of voters, poll workers, and candidates from municipalities with small, medium, and large populations to determine the efficacy of EDR. The report must include observations, results, and ways to enhance ballot security and privacy.

§§ 3-8 & 14 — Presidential Ballots

The law permits certain U.S. citizens who are at least 18 years old to apply for and vote a presidential ballot to cast a vote for president and vice president, but not any other office. The person must apply to the town clerk no sooner than 45 days before the election, and can do so up until the polls close on Election Day. The clerk must be satisfied that the applicant is eligible for the ballot, and the applicant must sign a statement under penalty of false statement that the information he or she provides is true.

Prior law allowed unregistered Connecticut residents and former state residents who moved to another state after its registration deadline to apply for a presidential ballot. The act eliminates provisions allowing current Connecticut residents to vote by presidential ballot, leaving the procedure in place for former state residents only. Under the act, unregistered state residents would instead follow EDR procedures.

The application and voting procedures (which include the requirement to show current ID) remain the same as under existing law. The act also eliminates the requirement for clerks to mail duplicate copies of presidential ballot applications to the appropriate state or local official in the municipality where the applicant resides or formerly resided.

§ 10 — ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION

The act requires the secretary of the state to establish and maintain an online

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voter registration system. In addition to new registrations, the system must permit a registered voter to apply to make changes online to his or her registration information. The act sets no deadline for the secretary to establish the system.

Eligibility

An applicant may register to vote through the online voter registration system if his or her (1) registration information is verifiable and (2) signature is in a federal or state database and may be imported into the system. (The secretary must include the applicant's signature as part of the application.) The applicant must also meet this state's eligibility requirements for registration.

Required Information

The act requires the online application to contain the same information that the law requires for mail-in voter registration applications, except that the signature must be imported from another state agency's database. This means the application must contain the applicant's:

1. name;
2. bona fide residence, including street number, street address, apartment number if applicable, town, and zip code;
3. telephone number;
4. date of birth;
5. party affiliation, if any; and
6. Connecticut motor vehicle operator's license number or, if none, the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security number.

It must also indicate whether the applicant:

1. is registered as an elector in any other Connecticut town or in any other state, and if so, the applicant's last previous voting residence;
2. is a U.S. citizen; and
3. will be age 18 on or before Election Day.

Verification and Approval

The act requires state agencies to provide information to the secretary of the state, at her request, that she deems necessary to maintain the online voter registration system. It authorizes the secretary to use any state or federal government database, or another state's voter registration database, to cross reference and verify applicants' information, but prohibits her from using the information for any other purpose.

For an online voter registration or change in registration to be approved, an applicant must click the box next to the following statement:

By clicking on the box below, I swear or affirm all of the following under penalty of perjury:

1. I am the person whose name and identifying information is provided on this form, and I desire to register to vote in the State of Connecticut.

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2. All of the information I have provided on this form is true and correct as of the date I am submitting this form.
3. I authorize the Department of Motor Vehicles or other Connecticut state agency to transmit to the Connecticut Secretary of the State or my town's registrars of voters my signature that is on file with such agency and understand that such signature will be used by the Secretary of the State or my town's registrars of voters on this online application for admission as an elector as if I had signed this form personally.

Once they approve an online application, the registrars must send an approval notice according to procedures the law establishes for other voter registration approvals. This means the registrars must send the notice by first-class mail and the envelope must have instructions for returning it if it is not deliverable to the address shown.

When Electoral Privileges Attach

The act aligns the deadlines for online registration applications with the deadlines that the law sets for mail-in registration applications. This means that for electoral privileges to attach by an upcoming primary or election, applicants must register by the 5th or 14th day preceding it, respectively. Otherwise, privileges attach the day after the primary or election, as appropriate. Under these circumstances, the act authorizes registrars to contact applicants, by telephone or mail, to inform them of the effect of applying late and the deadlines for registering in person.

CVRS MAINTENANCE

The act authorizes the secretary of the state to enter into an agreement with any other state to share information or data that will help maintain the CVRS. Information or data the secretary receives from a federal or state agency may only be used for CVRS maintenance.

If the state or federal agency providing the information or data required it to be kept confidential, the secretary must ensure it remains confidential, with one exception. The secretary may provide the information she receives to a nonpartisan, third-party vendor for purposes of maintaining the CVRS as long as she (1) supervises the vendor's activities and (2) has entered into an agreement with the vendor to protect the confidentiality of the information or data.

OLR Tracking: KS:RC:JL:ts:eh