



Town of Fairfield • Registrar of Voters Office
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Dear Co-Chairs Musto and Jutila, Ranking Members Hwang and McLachlan, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to offer input on the election topics that are being raised at today's public hearing. I would like to share my thoughts on two of the bills being heard today.

Testimony on SB 431: An Act Concerning the Secretary of the State, Proclamations of a Civil Preparedness Emergency and Notice of Legislative Sessions

Section 1 this bill contains the following phrase:

“[T]he Secretary of the State shall, upon the request of both registrars of voters of a municipality holding an election following such proclamation or declaration, have legal standing to seek court intervention on behalf of such municipality in the superior court for the judicial district of Hartford.”

I would like to bring to your attention that, per CGS § 9-190, towns may elect up to four Registrars of Voters, and the use of the word “both” in relation to the authorities or duties of Registrars has proven confusing to municipalities with more than two Registrars. The usage of “both” here could also cause legal ambiguity for those towns which have a vacancy in one of their Registrar positions, which should be avoided in an emergency situation. Please consider authorizing the Secretary to seek this intervention on the request of “all registrars” or “each registrar” in a municipality.

It may also be wise to allow such requests for intervention to be made in the case of primaries and referenda as well as elections occurring during a civil preparedness emergency.

Testimony on HJ 16: Resolution Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Grant Increased Authority to the General Assembly Regarding Election Administration

I watched last year's floor debates on this issue carefully, and wanted to address the question of fraudulent voting as it relates to the proposed amendment. Absentee ballots are a legitimate source for concern, as they allow someone wishing to cast illegitimate votes the opportunity to do so without appearing before (and thus being identified by) election officials, as well as risking coercion or vote-buying that would not be able to occur inside the privacy of a voting booth.

However, requiring an excuse of absentee voters does not improve the security of our election system. Many would-be voters are disenfranchised when they find themselves with unanticipated personal or professional obligations, and a number of our voters were unable to vote when they were

unexpectedly displaced from the region by Hurricane Sandy. Our Constitution doesn't permit people facing these situations to vote early in anticipation of possible problems.

On the other hand, there are two categories of fraudulent absentee voters -- those who vote absentee for convenience despite being available to vote on Election Day, and those who vote someone else's ballot. Requiring an excuse makes the former (who votes once only, for themselves) a criminal, but does not provide any obstacle at all to someone who has already committed themselves to a course of action that includes filling in a ballot and signing in the name of another person.

In my view, requiring the "excuse" creates a disenfranchising hurdle for legitimate voters that offers no tangible benefit to election administration or security whatsoever.

If HJ 16 were to become law, the decision to implement no-excuse absentee balloting or early voting would be made by a future session of the General Assembly, and there are a number of options that would be available to you to genuinely promote election integrity at that time:

- 1) Replace access to absentee ballots for some current "excuse categories" with early, in-person voting with protections in line with our current polling place operations;
- 2) Introduce signature-matching (made feasible with the expanded access to electronic signature data in HB 5024 which was passed last session) to detect absentee ballot materials completed by spouses, parents, or others in the name of voters;
- 3) Introduce spot-check verification of delivery addresses for absentee ballots to ensure that materials are received by those requesting them;
- 4) Require that mailed ballots be sent with postage-paid return envelopes to limit the handling of absentee materials by political campaigns; and/or
- 5) Expand online tools such as the state voter registration database or the forthcoming online voter registration system so that all absentee ballot applications are serial numbered to track chain of custody and deter misuse.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but will hopefully stimulate your thinking about how expanding access to the ballot can simultaneously reinforce the security and integrity of our election system.