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Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 778 March 11, 2013

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hwang and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I want to thank you for raising **Senate Bill 778, An Act Concerning the Reduction of Polling Places for a Primary.**

Voter turnout has been a concern for many towns in Connecticut. There is no surprise that voter turnout for a primary is significantly lower than that of the general election. In fact, in 2012, voter turnout for the primary was only 14.3 percent whereas voter turnout for the general election was nearly 74 percent. Under current law, towns are required to have the same number of polling places for both primary and general elections regardless of this huge difference in voter turnout. By having to properly staff and maintain these primaries, small towns are struggling both financially and logistically for workers. This bill would give municipalities the ability to adjust the number of polling places in their area to fit their specific needs.

Registrars of voters are finding it more and more difficult to keep their budgets as low as possible particularly in these tough economic times. There are multiple municipal savings that could aid in reducing costs for small towns through eliminating some polling locations. By reducing the number of polling places during primaries, this will lessen the number of staff, paperwork, supplies and tabulators required. These reductions can save a town thousands of dollars.

There are no political ramifications associated with this bill due to a provision that requires candidates to agree with the municipality's decision to reduce the number of polling places in the affirmative or no changes may occur. All electors will additionally be notified if their polling place has changed. Through these and other technical provisions, small towns can greatly benefit from this bill.

A similar bill to SB 778 was brought forth in 2012. SB 218, An Act Concerning Polling Places for Primaries was voted out of both the General Administration and Elections Committee along with the Planning and Development Committee. It was passed on consent in both the House and the Senate and then eventually vetoed by the Governor. After reviewing the Governor's veto message, it states that "voters may be easily confused and reluctant to vote if their polling place is suddenly closed during a primary process." This is inaccurate because the proposal would have provided adequate notice by requiring registrars to notify voters of the change by mail at least 21 days before the primary. This year, I am asking this committee to once again consider this bill and realize the benefits it provides to small towns in Connecticut.

Very Truly Yours,
State Senator Kevin Witkos