Joelyn Leon
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March 3, 2014

To: Senator Musto, Representative Jutila and Member of the Government Administration& Elections Committee

From: Joelyn Leon

Re: Raised S.B. No. 274, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR MINOR PARTY CANDIDATES

Good afternoon Mr. Chairmen and members of the committee. My name is Joelyn Leon. I reside in East Hampton, CT and am here to speak in favor of Raised Senate Bill No. 274, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR MINOR PARTY CANDIDATES.

On September 17, 2013, the Chairman of the Chatham Party, a minor party in East Hampton, CT, to which I belong, was notified that the names of all 16 Chatham Party candidates for municipal office would not appear on the election ballots due to the fact that each candidate's signature was not on the Certification of Party Endorsement filed with our Town Clerk. I was one of those candidates.

The Certification of Party Endorsement was filed on August 29, 2013, well in advance of the September 4, 2013 deadline and accepted by our Town Clerk. We met all of the filing date deadlines with the same required information that we provided in 2007, 2009, and 2011. However, we were told that in 2011, the legislature amended state election law to require minor party nominees in municipal elections to sign the certificate of endorsement that is filed with Town Clerks. Democratic and Republican endorsed candidates were given no such requirement in municipal elections. Please note that our 2011 filings did not have these signatures. The law was never communicated to our Town Chair nor was it enforced. All Chatham Party candidates were on the ballots that year. Had we been informed by our Town Clerk of the missing signatures, ample time, eight days in fact, was still available to collect these signatures before the filing deadline – signatures that were already filed with the Secretary of State.

I can't begin to explain the affect this had on me, my fellow candidates and the Chatham Party as a whole. In the 2011 election, Chatham Party candidates received 38.6% of the vote for Town Council and eight of our 14 candidates on the ballot were elected – more than both the Democrat and Republican parties combined. The Chatham Party held the majority on Town Council and all four incumbent candidates were running for re-election. So much was at stake in this election. But for the next month, all campaigning and fundraising was put on hold in order to fight to have our names remain. As you all know, the decision to run for public office, at any level, is a difficult one. The time one must commit to campaign is huge but necessary. To be

deprived of an entire month of campaigning, especially as a minor party, is not inconsequential. All monies raised were spent on an attorney to ensure that our names rightfully remain on the ballots and that the voters of East Hampton were not denied the opportunity to elect their choice of candidates.

Thankfully, the courts ruled in our favor on October 7, 2013. Unfortunately, so much negative and misinformation had been fed to the public by this time. Instead of campaigning effectively, we spent the next month explaining the reality of what had occurred. The legitimacy of our campaign had been questioned and our opponents took every opportunity to place doubt in people's minds.

I did not win the election, nor did any of the other Chatham Party candidates. Much can be called into question based on the outcome. What cannot be questioned is the true impact this unfair signature requirement had on the community, at the local level where public service is truly needed. Democracy was called into question by many. Voter turnout in local elections is already at painfully low levels. If voters continue to feel disenfranchised by laws that are clearly discriminatory, how will we ever successfully get all eligible voters out to the polls?

I urge your support for S.B. 274 and thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue.