



Town of Fairfield · Registrar of Voters Office
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Testimony of Matthew Waggoner, Registrar
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Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony concerning the proposed budget from the Secretary of the State's Office, specifically the budget for the Legislation and Elections Administration Division (LEAD).

As you are aware, the recommended budget reflects a cut to this division relative to FY 2014 actuals, current year estimates, and reduces the requested amounts by over \$250,000 in FY 2016 and \$300,000 in FY 2017.

These cuts come at a time that the legislature is considering proposals to change the structure of election administration in Connecticut, so I wanted to share a local perspective on the support provided by this division, and ask you to consider reversing the proposed cuts to prevent potentially serious damage to the already limited election safety net that LEAD provides.

Registrars of Voters depend on the LEAD staff for many of our duties: providing legal advice, receiving and disseminating voter registration cards and state agency data, preparing forms, providing access (both development and support) to online software tools, offering training, and providing memos and newsletters that turn the laws passed here at the Capitol into a functioning, on-the-ground implementation.

The truth is that this vital support system is currently strained to the breaking point:

- The state voter registration system is currently down or inaccessible for hours each day in towns all across the state, disrupting work at the local level during the annual list-maintenance period; this system suffers routine outages leading up to each election, with a prolonged statewide outage the day before the 2014 election.
- Planned system upgrades (such as the Election Night Reporting system) have been pending for years.
- Voter applications received by LEAD before the pre-election deadline routinely arrive in town offices after final voting lists are printed, and occasionally following the election, disenfranchising new voters.
- Forms required by statute are years late in being developed, leading to confusion and non-standard implementation of policies like voter removal programs.
- The elections training unit, which has required dedicated training personnel under Sec. 9-4b since 2005, nonetheless remains unstaffed. This results in other division staff repeatedly teaching previously-developed courses, diverting them from other duties, while classes taught by volunteer Registrars are required to meet the minimum required training hours for local election officials. This limits professional development, and created a situation where the only training offered to newly-elected Registrars overseeing the recent special elections was provided by the Registrars Association, not from the Secretary of the State.

- A Registrar certification program has been required by statute since 1998 (Sec. 9-192a), but is not being offered due to a lack of funds, and the Secretary has not yet approved a curriculum for this program.
- Powers granted to the Secretary's office in the 2011 election reform package, such as the ability to oversee polling places and replace ineffective pollworkers, have never been implemented systematically for lack of resources.
- We have experienced a dramatic reduction or elimination of publications (such as voter guides, newsletters, and statewide memos) in recent years.

The election community – from the LEAD staff to local Registrars and our thousands of pollworkers – do everything in our power to adapt and compensate for the flaws in our system, both structural problems and surprise issues that arise at election time. I am, despite the criticism that is often directed at us, proud of the job that we are able to do for our voters.

Speaking personally, I spend dozens of hours each week beyond my office hours providing support to Registrars in other communities, answering questions, developing desktop and web-based software tools to enable Registrars to perform statutory duties that have never been provided for at the state level, using self-purchased GIS software to provide redistricting services not offered by the state, and obtaining the professional training that I feel is necessary by attending conferences and classes out of state at my own expense. (I'm unable to attend today's hearing in person, for example, due to my participation at an election technology conference this week.) I'm not alone in this – many of us commit countless volunteer hours and dollars to the proper functioning of elections across the state.

However, as members of the Appropriations committee, you are all familiar with the phrase "do less with more," and you certainly know the limits of that philosophy. My testimony is not a criticism, but an alert to you that despite the efforts of some very talented people at LEAD and a lot of volunteer hours at the local level, the resources currently available to manage elections are insufficient to provide the consistent and reliable experience that many people expect. **Reducing the state resources dedicated to elections by seven to nine percent – while potentially implementing a dramatic reduction in personnel at the local level – will have a significant negative impact on the reliability of our elections in the years to come.**

Secretary Merrill speaks eloquently about a future of properly-staffed, regionally-run, civil-service election administration, and I share her belief that this vision could deliver improved services to Connecticut voters. At the same time, current funds are not enough to provide the technology, infrastructure, training, or raw labor hours needed to perform the duties already required by law.

I would respectfully ask the committee to recommend a budget which does not make further cuts to the Connecticut election safety net, and, looking forward, if you feel that we do need to improve the level of election services offered in Connecticut, that you appropriate funds sufficient to meet the basic training and infrastructure requirements that are currently established in statute.

Thank you for your consideration: I would be glad to answer any questions you may have by email or phone.