Testimony Relevant to the Secretary of the State's Proposal to
Improve Election Administration in Connecticut,
Professionalize Office of Registrar of Voters

Paul S. Herrnson

March 9, 2015

My name is Paul Herrnson. I am a Professor of Political Science at the University of Connecticut and the Executive Director of the Roper Center. Prior to working at UConn, I was Director of the Center for American Politics and Citizenship, Professor in the Department of Political Science, and Distinguished Scholar-Teacher at the University of Maryland.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I am here to share some research and experience related to voting and election administration under a professionalized nonpartisan system. I am not here in an advocacy role. Indeed, my knowledge is based on research performed nationwide and in Maryland; I have limited knowledge of the unique system used in Connecticut.

The information and views presented below are mine. They do not represent those of UConn or any other organization.

For the last 15 years I have researched the human side of the voting experience. One stream of research shows that differences in voting equipment, ballot designs, and polling place environments have an impact on voters' abilities to cast a ballot independently and without the need for help, the number and type of errors they make when voting, and their satisfaction with the voting process. This research also provides insights into the impact of voting machine design on the abilities of poll workers to set up election equipment. Another stream of research assesses the impact of mobilization messages on early voting and voting using an absent ballot downloaded from the Internet. (For a list of relevant publications see http://www.polisci.uconn.edu/people/faculty/doc/herrnson_cv.pdf.)

Overall, the findings demonstrate that new technologies have made elections much more complicated for voters, political campaigners, election administrators, and, when disputes arise—lawyers. These results cannot be overstated. The phrases "butterfly ballot" and "dimpled chad" entered our lexicon because voting interfaces resulted in some voters being unable to cast their ballots as intended in a close presidential election.

Research indicates there are several advantages to employing qualified professional election administrators:

I. Their knowledge, skills, and career orientation enhance their abilities to
    1. Use current election equipment, work with vendors who sell and service it, and train others to use it
    2. Identify shortcomings in ballot design, polling place set up, and other issues
    3. Anticipate potential problems and build in contingencies to address them
    4. Keep abreast of new technology and developments

II. Their skills and professionalism encourage local participation in testing equipment under consideration for purchase.
   1. In Maryland, I worked with election officials to develop and test voting equipment and independent vote-verification systems.

III. Capitalize on opportunities to obtain grants to recruit and train election judges or for other matters.
   1. In Maryland, I collaborated with county and state election administrators to win an Election Assistance Commission grant for poll worker recruitment and training.
   2. Collaborations with election administrators in several states were involved in some other funded projects.

IV. Their presence helps ensure that the parties are appropriately represented when
   1. Ballots are checked for design flaws
   2. Poll workers are recruited
   3. Voters are checked in
   4. Voter assistance is needed or other issues arise
   5. And, throughout the chain of custody of ballots and voting equipment

V. By minimizing problems in elections, professional administrators help avoid negative publicity, traditionally underrepresented groups, military personnel and their families, overseas citizens, and residents of certain municipalities.

In conclusion, elections are the most important aspect of a democracy and employing qualified professional election administrators has been shown to provide some advantages.

Thank you.

Paul S. Herrnson
Professor, Department of Political Science &
Executive Director, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research
University of Connecticut
365 Fairfield Way U-1024
Storrs, CT 06269-1024
PHONE 860.486-8336/2440
FAX 860.486.3347
EMAIL paul.herrnson@uconn.edu