

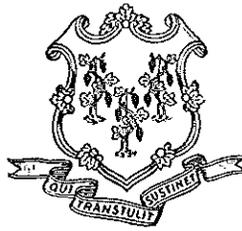
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## State of Connecticut

### SENATE

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### WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB6904 PRESENTED TO THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

March 9, 2015

Greetings to the Chairs and the esteemed members of the GAE Committee. My name is Eric Coleman and I enjoy the very high privilege of serving as the state senator of the second senatorial district.

I appreciate the opportunity to address you concerning HB6904 and other bills on your agenda which address elections and the registrar of voters position.

First, let me be extremely clear – no voter who is legitimately eligible to vote should be denied the opportunity to do so.

Secondly, if there are important things to learn from the unfortunate event of November 4, 2015 and the investigation into that event, one of those things is that for so long we have taken for granted elections and what registrars do in preparation for elections. There are a lot of moving parts to an election and the registrars office must depend upon the effective coordination of all of those parts. For example, if the printing department, the IT department, the town clerk's office do not work cooperatively with the registrars office, the resulting breakdown is likely to impair the quality of the election day operation. Registrars throughout Connecticut should be highly commended for the many substantially issue free elections that they have managed over the years.

With that having been said, you have heard members of the Hartford legislative delegation and at least one member of the Hartford City Council speak in favor of HB6904. I am a member of the Hartford legislative delegation, and to be certain, my colleagues and I agree on many more issues than on those we disagree. However, while I am a member of the Hartford delegation, there are significant differences between me and my delegation members. First, I have not been invited to participate in any of the discussions surrounding the matter of reforming the registrar's position and secondly, the other members of the delegation may be more trusting of the Hartford political apparatus because, unlike me, they have never been opposed by that apparatus. Consequently, with all due respect to my colleagues, I do not share their opinion regarding HB6904. For a number of reasons I am opposed to HB6904, and specifically any provisions that would provide for the appointment of one registrar rather than the election of two registrars.

As is typically the case with many situations, there are two sides to the story of the failures of election day in Hartford on November 4, 2015. Unfortunately, the case presented by Hartford officials is misleading because it does not mention the numerous attempts by Hartford officials to interfere with the Hartford Registrars Office. That interference borders upon harassment, and this harassment of the office has appeared in the form of budget cuts, staff reductions, denial of endorsement, charter revisions and finally proposed statutory changes, such as the one being presented to your committee now.

I find it extremely ironic that so many who profess to be concerned about the opportunity for voters to vote are advocating so vociferously for the appointment of rather than the election by voters of the registrar of voters.

Also, the argument that voters chose to have registrars appointed rather than elected is terribly misleading. The voters were never presented with the simple, stand alone question concerning whether or not they preferred to elect registrars or have registrars appointed. Rather, a provision having to do with the appointment of registrars was presented as a part of a charter revision package, which had many appealing components to it that were totally unrelated to the office of the Registrar of Voters.

Additionally, the election of two registrars represents a time tested and effective check and balance in the system. A single registrar appointed by a chief elected official or local legislative body is particularly susceptible to partisan political pressure. As one who has experienced efforts by Hartford politicians to manipulate the system to the advantage of their endorsed candidates, HB6904 would make it even easier for that Hartford brand of undue influence to be exercised.

Finally, any system can be improved and that is true of the registrars system (even in Hartford). Training, certification, electronic modernization and other technological improvements are good initiatives to explore. Also, more authority for the Secretary of State or the State Elections Enforcement Commission to address violations of election laws is a reform that would represent significant and much needed improvement to the system. However, I believe that it is an over-reaction to eliminate the election of the registrars of voters in favor of their appointment. Moreover, while some Hartford officials argue in favor of the municipal option approach provided for in HB6904 as a remedy to specifically address Hartford's concern, it is merely a matter of a change in the majority composition of any town's local legislative body or a bad fiscal year before other municipalities may decide to take advantage of the illusory quick fix provided for in HB6904.

For all of the foregoing reasons, I urge you to reject HB6904.