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Subject: Testimony in support of S.B. No. 848

February 6, 2015

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS

Testimony in support of S.B. No. 848, AN ACT CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF POLLING PLACES AND MODERATORS FOR PRIMARIES

Senators Cassano and Gerratana, Representatives Jutila and Alexander, and members of the committee, I am Karen Cortés, Democratic Registrar of Voters for the Town of Simsbury. I am submitting testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 848, An Act Concerning the number of Polling Places and Moderators for Primaries.

Simsbury's voter turnout is consistently high— Republican turnout for the 2010 state primary was the highest in the state, and our town has been honored with the Democracy Cup for highest turnout for a town of our size statewide.

Even with such strong voter participation, Simsbury could easily accommodate the number of primary voters appearing at the polls in fewer locations than are used for the general election. A full 41.7% of the Connecticut electorate is ineligible to vote in primaries, and among the remaining eligible voters, turnout is comparatively low. This bill would allow Registrars to determine the number of locations needed to accommodate voters, allow us to share an election moderator, and provides for notification of affected voters.

In 2012, just 744 Republican voters in Simsbury—14.5% of those eligible—participated in the Republican Presidential Primary. The 2008 Presidential primaries, Simsbury had Democratic turnout of 51.1%; and Republican turnout of just 36.7%. In August of 2008, the average turnout for state senate and representatives was only 13.9% of eligible voters. For the 8th Senatorial District State Senate Primary that year, we opened, staffed, and paid for four polling locations for 840 voters.

In all of these cases, Simsbury could have easily consolidated our four polling locations to a single location—as we do for our town's budget referendum. Reducing the number of polling locations and sharing a mutually agreed upon Moderator would achieve reduced poll staffing, office staffing, equipment moving, and memory card programming expenses. Under S.B. #848 Simsbury could have saved approximately \$10,000—savings which could be replicated in towns across our state. While taxpayer savings are achieved, we also hope that the notification portion of this bill will increase voter awareness.

In response to concerns about voter confusion: In 2011, during the winter storm that left three out of four of our polling locations unusable on Election Day, Simsbury successfully consolidated its polling locations by notifying residents with lawn signs that were placed throughout town and at normal polling locations in the days ahead of the election. Over 6000 voters cast ballots without incident.

I ask that you move this bill forward to give us the flexibility to serve our voters while eliminating unnecessary expenditures from our budget.

Thank you.

Karen Cortés
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