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**Government Administration and Elections Committee
Public Hearing Testimony
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Good afternoon, Chairmen Cassano and Jutila and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Denise Merrill and I am Secretary of the State of Connecticut. I would like to comment on a couple of bills that are before you today.

HB 6113 An Act Expanding the Use of Absentee Ballots

This proposal would allow for an individual to vote by absentee ballot if they are absent from their town at any time during the time of voting. Currently, the state constitution and General Statutes set very narrow parameters for what makes an elector eligible to vote by absentee ballot.

The constitution includes a list of reasons that allow for absentee voting, one of which is "absence from the town". The statute that reiterates the criteria for absentee ballots says that one must be absent "during all hours of voting".

The difference in this language offers us an opportunity to expand the use of absentee ballots for, say, those who will be gone from town during the majority of hours of voting.

Although this is a far cry from no-excuse absentee ballots, it does offer greater service to the public and that is a goal I support.

Where mail-in voting occurs it is widely popular, and I frequently hear from people that they would like to do that here too.

I support this proposal.

HB 6110 An Act Requiring Joint Campaigning by Candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor in Primaries

In Connecticut, candidates for Governor and Lt. Governor are nominated independently at the state convention, and run separately in the primary.

As a result, there have been on occasion, "forced marriages" among candidates for the general election because the governor and lieutenant governor candidates were each aligned with a different partner initially.

This proposal would make changes to the way primaries are conducted in the state because it would require candidates for governor and lieutenant governor to pair up at the onset of the campaign cycle and run together as a team.

This idea is a good one. How this changes the primary process needs to be carefully considered, but this is an interesting proposal and I would like to be helpful in any way that I can.

HB 5300 An Act Concerning the Regional Consolidation of Certain Functions of Elections Administration

In most states election administration is a function of county government. And so I am entirely confident when I say that there are several elements of the election process that could be improved with a regional structure.

In fact, I'd like to point out that Connecticut, in size and population, is smaller than San Diego County.

For example, the training of moderators and even poll-workers could be done by my agency partnering with the regional entity that would handle logistics.

In fact, that was very much the model of my agency about a dozen years ago before significant cuts and staff reductions were made.

A regional center could also facilitate the post election audits. Specifically, I mean the implementation of a new high-speed scanner system developed by my agency and the UConn Voter Center that could be distributed to the centers for the towns of their regional to use.

This is a task that is difficult to plan and manage because the audits are randomly selected and therefore cannot be anticipated in the budget.

A regional entity could also potentially capture economies of scale for the towns when negotiating vendor contracts, ordering ballots or buying equipment.

I would also like to mention that we have navigated two elections during a state of emergency due to weather events. Regional structures would have been helpful as towns were trying to figure out how to print voter lists for Election Day when their power was out, for example.

Thank you for putting this idea forward.