



TOWN OF BETHANY

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March 9, 2015

Dear Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila and
Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony concerning SB 1051, *An Act Strengthening Connecticut's Elections*. We strongly oppose a number of the key features of this bill. At the same time, there are other components that we agree would provide valuable reforms and therefore fully support.

Our main objection is the sweeping change in the manner of choosing Registrars of Voters and reducing the number. In Bethany, we have an excellent working relationship between the two Registrars, Town Clerk and Selectmen and see little need for such a radical change. We acknowledge that there have been isolated issues around the state over the years, but the vast majority of towns are doing fine. Minor reforms, such as additional training, Registrar certification and improved reporting methods will provide the desired improvements to the voting process.

Having two Registrars, one from each major party, has worked very well in our experience. Despite having the word "Democratic" and "Republican" as part of the job title, it is actually an extremely non-partisan position. Having two sets of eyes on everything provides a level of comfort to the general public, candidates and election officials alike. If there were only one Registrar, appointed by whatever party is in power at the time, we foresee a large increase in Elections Enforcement complaints. Many of these potential complaints are currently handled locally by the Registrar of the same political party simply explaining the process. The State Elections Enforcement budget would certainly need to be increased if a change to a single Registrar were to be implemented.

We believe that some technical issues with the bill would have a detrimental impact on the conduct of elections. The method of choosing a Registrar, as outlined in Section 1, is clumsy. The legislative body is empowered to appoint the Registrar, but the Town Clerk is charged with choosing a Deputy Registrar. The Registrar is then given the authority to name Assistant Registrars. Who is really in charge of elections administration?

The actual process of choosing a single Registrar is unclear. The legislative body makes the appointment "in consultation and coordination with the municipal clerk." Does the Town Clerk make recommendations? What if the Clerk does not agree with the legislative body? If the Clerk and the legislative body are of different political parties this could create an unnecessary conflict and potentially delay the appointment.

Another problem: In Section 1 is a provision that has the municipal clerk assuming the Registrar responsibilities in the Registrar's absence. This has always been the duty of the Deputy Registrar and is implicit in that title. Besides this, there is no provision for training or certifying Town Clerks for election administration. This is not fair to Town Clerks and is a recipe for disaster if the Registrar becomes incapacitated shortly before an Election.

Finally, having Town Clerks serving as Registrars of Voters, runs contrary to the long-standing prohibition against one person holding both offices. Section 9-210 of the general statutes declares these to be "incompatible town offices." Section 7 of this bill attempts to address this by replacing the word "elected" with "appointed" for Registrars. But the overall prohibition is still in place. CGS section 9-210 was put on the books long ago to provide proper checks and balances. It should not be abandoned lightly.

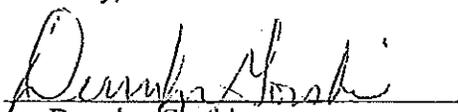
There are a few portions of the bill with which we do agree and feel would improve elections. Sections 19 to 22 deal with election night reporting requirements. They establish a two-step reporting process enabling towns to transmit the raw vote totals immediately, while providing a 48 hour window after the election for a complete report. We feel this makes sense and will ensure more accurate reporting overall. At the end of election night, it is easy to make mistakes after working 16 hours straight. Transmitting the raw data from the tabulators quickly will enable candidates, officials and the general public to rapidly ascertain the likely election winners.

Bethany had an experience at the last election that highlights this issue. After the list counters completed their task and went home, we found a discrepancy of 40+ voters that we couldn't explain. The two Registrars, Moderator and a few other poll workers had to recount the list several times to find the problem. The count was fine, but there was a simple error adding up the page totals. There was no impact on the winners and losers, but because of the existing requirements that the statistical data be included, we were delayed well over an hour in reporting results to the Secretary of the State's office.

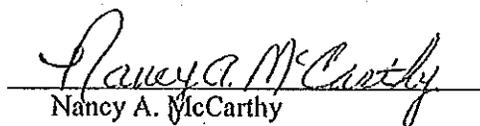
Finally, we also strongly agree with sections requiring additional training and certification for Registrars. As a group, Registrars have been asking for more training and better technology for quite some time.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our remarks. Please feel free to contact any of us if you have questions with our testimony.

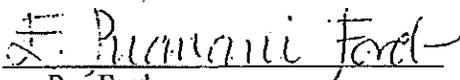
Sincerely,



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