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Testimony Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 9, 2015

Good Afternoon

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about Senate Bill 1051, An Act Strengthening Connecticut's Elections. I support the intent of the bill.

As a former Deputy Democratic Registrar of Voters, certified moderator, unofficial checker and current Democratic Town Committee Chair, I have experienced first hand the result of the lack of accountability and professionalism in Middletown's Registrar of Voters office.

Since Secretary Merrill's press release did an excellent job of highlighting the issues and solutions with the current Registrar of Voters system, I would just like to note a few examples from my experiences.

Attending the ROVAC (Registrar of Voters Association of Connecticut) conferences, it was surprising to hear comments made by the attendees that they did not have to listen to the SOTS (Secretary of the State) staff as the SOTS was advisory. In fact, I was reprimanded by the other registrar for researching and quoting State Statute when it came to the office procedures.

As elected officials, time and attendance is left up to the registrars and an absentee registrar is not held accountable. Lengthy absences are not addressed.

When one registrar is more assertive than the other; work and accountability suffer. Contrary to assumptions, having both parties hold office does not always produce a balance. From conversations with other towns, ours was in some aspects a mild situation. No curtain was erected or separate office demanded to separate the parties. What did transpire was the control by one party of the communication with outside agencies via mail and email. Recently when challenged regarding the control of communication by one party, the other party was told, "that's the way I do it". Thus leaving the other staff person to either make an issue of it or be quiet.

While the office conducts the required once per year voter registration at our two public high schools, by registering students during the 20 minute lunch periods they do not fulfill the spirit of the statute. The registrars could avail themselves access to our seniors during any of the half dozen events where the students are gathered for

a more relaxing and lengthy time, such as the senior breakfast, project graduation, and the graduation rehearsals. The effort could also be made to encourage the senior class elected officers to register their classmates. When I tried to arrange these other voter registration events, the other party refused to attend so I could not since both parties have to be represented.

The attitude that Wesleyan University students should not have the right to vote in Middletown was stated openly and their voting registration addresses were modified without any documentation from the voter.

During a tough municipal election, when a campaign manager requested a report, he was erroneously told that they could provide the report in 60 days, was charged \$1 per page (which had not been the practice) and was told he must come to the office to discuss issues with the registrar rather than by phone or email. The fact that he worked out of town did not make a difference to the registrar.

During one election, there was a very tight State Senate race, which would have resulted in a re-count. When the ballot bags were going to be placed in an unsecure location, I requested that they be placed in the Town Clerk's safe. The other registrar ended up screaming in the Town Clerk's office but the bags were secured. All of the hysteria was totally unprofessional.

The registrars do not require training of poll workers. If the worker does not come to training, they still work. This results in checkers asking for photo id's, checkers not requiring the voter to announce their address and name so that it can be heard, moderators misstating rules, a HAVA accessible voting system not being ready when polls opened and tab tenders standing right next to the tabulator and looking at the ballots. When we provided our moderators and assistance moderators with binders containing the rules and procedures, we were reprimanded and told it was not legal.

The registrars have refused to entertain the greater use of technology during election night. This bill would ensure that this state moves forward in this regard.

While these issues may sound minor or even petty, the overall effectiveness of the office suffers and the residence and voters are not served, as they should be.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.