

Public Hearing Testimony: SB1051

Katherine G. Grace
Registrar of Voters
Beacon Falls

I would like to address my opposition to SB1051. As you know, right now we have two registrars (one from each party) in each town. That means that there are two sets of eyes checking all aspects of an election. Testing memory cards, setting up the tabulator for the election and supervising absentee ballots in nursing homes are just a few such examples.

One of the reasons cited for the need for SB1051 is that, with the current system registrars are chosen by their respective parties and therefore are actually partisan positions. Nothing could be further from the truth. With two registrars of voters, one from each party, the voters are assured of non-partisan elections. With just one registrar, chosen by the elected mayor or first selectman and working under the elected town clerk, the chances for partisan politics entering into the running of elections process are much more likely. In many towns, the Mayor or First Selectman and the Town Clerk are members of the same party. It is likely that they would choose a Registrar of Voters from that same party, leaving the minority party completely out of the election process.

In support of SB1051, it has been noted that most states leave election administration to the town clerk. As I stated earlier, the town clerk is elected. Each party chooses someone for town clerk and the voters choose one to oversee that office. This is certainly more partisan than each party choosing someone to serve as registrar and having both of them administer elections.

Another argument that is offered in support of SB1051, is that other towns have a bi-partisan board of election who hires professional staff to manage day-to-day operations. That is what we have in place now! We have two registrars, (one from each party) acting as a bi-partisan board of elections. In large cities, and even in some smaller cities and towns, the registrars hire professional office staff. In an effort to save money, most registrars of small towns handle the day-to-day operations of the office.

SB1051 mandates annual training administered by the state. Registrars are already required to attend training twice a year. Much of this training is conducted by staff from the SOS's office. Additional training is also conducted by ROVAC.

SB1051 also calls for new and improved technology. Most registrars would welcome this. In fact, many registrars have been asking for this for years. The reason we don't have some of the technology mentioned in the bill is, quite frankly, a matter of finances. Many of these suggestions would put an undo Burdon on local towns.

We have a good election system in Connecticut. Could there be improvements? Yes. Almost every year changes are made in the laws and directives to improve the administration of election. Changes should be made in areas of education and technology, but I urge you not to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater.'