



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF CONNECTICUT, INC.

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**CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee**

March 9, 2015, Public Hearing

**Comments on:**

**SB 1051 AA Strengthening Connecticut's Elections**

Testimony by Gloria S. Bent, Co-President of LWVCT

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Co-Chairmen Jutila and Cassano, and members of the Committee, my name is Gloria Bent, and I am Co-President of the League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a nonpartisan, statewide organization committed to the active involvement of citizens in their government and improving the electoral process. As you may know, the League advocates on the basis of positions adopted after members' study and a consensus process, with regular review and update.

Paramount to our Election Laws Position, the League believes that the political process must be open to all citizens and that the right to vote with confidence in the election process must be guaranteed. This Committee has the opportunity to jumpstart the conversation on how this state can better achieve the essential goal of citizen confidence in the election process. The League believes that this opportunity should be seized now.

Connecticut currently is the only state to rely on a system of dual registrars of voters for each town, selected to run and elected on the basis of party affiliation. The League believes this sole status no longer serves the needs of all of our voters, nor does it promote confidence in our electoral process. We believe there is consensus that now is the time to reform Connecticut's local election administration system.

Voter disenfranchisement has been the regular outcome of the state's failure to adapt. Regardless of whether disenfranchisement arises from the failure of polling places to open on time, or too few ballots or incorrect ballots at the polling places, or difficulties effectively employing new voting-related technology—it is unacceptable in this day and age.

Connecticut is capable of evolving to an election administration which meets the fundamental goals of: **Accountability**, including standards of operation which are enforceable throughout the state; and **Professionalism**, which requires the ability to train and certify election officials. A dual registrar system with registrars from each of the major parties has been justified on the

grounds of "keeping an eye on each other." Quality and impartiality of administration can be better advanced by insistence on professionalization and accountability, as august bipartisan national commissions and independent research organizations have articulated.<sup>1,2,3.</sup>

Election administration is public administration. This obligation is to all the voters, including the largest class in this state: voters who are not affiliated with any political party. For the League, public administration requires responsible officials who are chosen and serve based upon expertise and experience, and a system for enforcing adherence to professional standards which voters have every right to expect.

In order to develop consensus on how to adapt the current problem-plagued registrar system, the Committee should direct the Secretary of State to appoint a Blue Ribbon Commission with appropriate representation, and a firm deadline for an implementation plan.

SB 1051 includes measures that we believe will improve the electoral process and promote fair and accurate electoral results. We urge this Committee to adopt the bill components for:

- A program for training, examination and certification of registrars of voters.
- Statewide coordination of training for registrars, deputy registrars and poll workers.
- Consistency in voter registration deadlines.
- Updating the election reporting process.
- Required posting of acceptable forms of identification for voters in all polling places.
- Enabling municipalities to work together in the election process.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut believes that reviewing Connecticut's election laws must be a continuing activity, in light of the evolving technology in voting systems, new legislation and regulations, and the needs of the public. Connecticut has accomplished laudatory improvements in election administration, such as online voter registration, Election Day registration and permanent absentee ballots for the physically disabled.

In sum, the League urges your support for measures promoting Connecticut voters' confidence in our election process. We thank you again for this opportunity to comment.

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1. Presidential Commission on Election Administration, *Professionalism in Election Administration from The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration*, January 17, 2014. Available at <http://www.supportthevoter.gov/>.
  2. *Millions to the Polls: Non-Partisan Election Administration*. J Mijin Cha and Liz Kennedy. Demos. February 18, 2014. Available at <http://www.demos.org/publication/millions-polls-non-partisan-election-administration>.
  3. *Building Confidence in U.S. Elections: Report of the Commission on Federal Election Reform*. American University, September 2005. Available at <http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Exhibit%20M.PDF>.