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SB-1051 AN ACT STRENGTHENING CONNECTICUT'S ELECTIONS.

Greetings, Senator Cassano, Representive Jutilla, my own Representative Jonathan Steinberg and members of the GAE Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify on the SB-1051 today. I am Marla Cowden, Democratic Registrar for the Town of Westport. I speak only for myself in this testimony.

In analyzing the proposed legislation, we must ask "What problems are we trying to solve?" These appear to be:

1) Can we improve our election systems?
2) Can we accomplish efficiencies and improve effectiveness through regionalization?

Can we improve our election systems? Yes, of course we can. But we need to look first at where we are starting from. Connecticut spends approximately 10% of what the average cost for elections is nationwide. Not 10% less, 10% in total. In Secretary Merrill's April press release she noted that in the Pew Center's Election Performance Index, CT and moved from 19th in the nation in 2008 to 10th in 2012. She also noted our rate of improvement was greater than the average and expressed confidence that we would improve our ranking further at the next evaluation.

So CT spends a good deal less and has a high performing election system. Very simple quadrant analysis says that's a great place to be – low cost and high performance, the best possible place to land in evaluating cost and performance.

As Secretary Merrill has pointed out, we are different from many other states. But different isn't always bad, sometimes different is simply better.

Any push to improve our elections systems should seek to analyze just what has gotten CT to this favorable position, and to maintain the desirable aspects of that.

I believe we should look at the whole election system – from the voter to the Secretary of the State's (SOTS) office. This needs to be done independently, with all stakeholders from voter representatives to SOTS willing to take a look at what works well and what we can improve. Perhaps a blue ribbon commission or a task force would be best.

We need to take a hard look at the CT Voter Registration Computer System. Capacity, performance and security issues remain unaddressed though Registrars have sought their remedy for years.

Can we accomplish efficiencies and improve effectiveness through regionalization?

It may be possible. But this legislation would only accomplish it in a very piecemeal and haphazard way. Remember, most regionalized jurisdictions were planned for and set up that way. If CT is to move toward regionalization, it should be with a well thought out plan that recognizes the steps necessary to take us from where we are currently to where we need to get. And if we are to experiment with regionalization, we should do so first in functions where errors would not disfranchise voters. There are numerous examples of such functions in states with regionalization, we should experiment there first.

I would like to say that I support Section 43(g) allowing the use of the online registration module for election day registration. It will allow for greater efficiency in processing such registrations and decrease the wait time for these voters.