



# REGISTRAR OF VOTERS

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*Nancy J. Ryan, Registrar*  
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## **Testimony on SB 1051**

**An Act Concerning Strengthening Connecticut's Elections**  
**Government Administration and Elections Committee**  
**State of Connecticut General Assembly**  
**March 9, 2015**

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

This testimony is provided jointly by the Registrars of Voters of the Town of Bethel, Timothy Beeble and Nancy Ryan. We were both elected for the first time as Registrars of Voters in November 2014 by the voters of Bethel. We work well together in coordinating voter registration and administering elections for the people of Bethel. Our individual strengths complement each other and combine to provide excellence in the Registrars Office for the people of Bethel. The proposed legislation in SB 1051 will weaken and politicize the functions of the Registrar of Voters. Furthermore, it will impose an unnecessary financial burden on municipalities.

### **Elected versus Appointed Registrars:**

The base of Democracy in Connecticut is our bipartisan administration of elections. This is necessary for maintaining trust and confidence in the fairness of our election process by both our voters and our candidates. While elected registrars are accountable to the town's voters, an appointed registrar is only accountable to the majority party that is in power in the municipality. SB 1051 proposes that the state mandate municipalities to appoint a Registrar. The Secretary of State purports that an appointed Registrar will not be political. The fact is that nothing is more political than an appointment made by a majority of a small board that was elected on a partisan basis. Imagine if the General Assembly were not elected by the people but instead were appointed by the Governor. Would that make the legislature less political?

### **Bipartisan Dual Registrar Structure Provides Necessary Checks and Balances:**

The current system of having a Registrar of Voters from each of the major parties strengthens both voter registration and the administration of elections. It provides an ongoing system of checking each voter registration for accuracy in determining voter eligibility and imputing voter data into the state registration program. Eliminating the dual Registrar structure in Connecticut will at best result in a loss of oversight and an increase in voter registration errors. At worst, it could result in an undue partisan bias as a single Registrar carries-out registration and election duties without the watchful eye of another Registrar from the opposite party.

The Secretary of State suggests that under our current dual Registrar system no one is responsible for the proper administration of elections and registrations. In actuality, both Registrars are jointly and individually responsible for all aspects of the office. This is similar to home mortgage loans for jointly-owned property whereby both owners are individually responsible for repaying the entire mortgage debt rather than just half of it.

The local work load of voter registration and election administration work does not get cut in half by the state mandating that each municipality have only one Registrar. To do so will convert what typically is two part-time Registrar positions in small-to-medium municipalities into a single full-time position that will then trigger municipalities to pay a full time salary plus benefits. The net result is an added financial burden on the municipality and its taxpayers.

Primaries and caucuses are currently administered by the Registrar of that party. Under SB 1051, the party which does not have the majority on the local legislative body will feel uneasy with having their primaries and caucuses administered by the partisan Registrar from the opposite party.

Candidates for local and state office frequently request voter data from the Registrars. The current bi-partisan Registrar offices handle these requests promptly. This cannot be guaranteed if the state mandates that there be a single registrar who is appointed by the majority party in control of the local legislative body.

There are a number of Registrar functions that are very sensitive and susceptible to undue political influence, and therefore, currently require as a safeguard that both Registrars work side-by-side. Together, Registrars are required to supervise absentee voting by residents of nursing homes who often have limited vision capabilities and must rely on the two Registrars to assure that their voter intent is reflected on their ballot. Similarly, on election day, some voters will request personal assistance, and this must be provided by the two Registrars together.

In the current dual Registrar structure, each Registrar hires half of the poll workers for election day, so that each polling place will have workers, including absentee ballot counters from each party.

#### **Minimum qualifications**

SB 1051 would require that all Registrars hold a bachelor's degree. Frankly, the duties of a Registrar do not necessitate bachelor's degree. There is no such college degree requirement to be a Town Clerk, nor a Secretary of State, nor Governor of Connecticut. Similarly, there is no minimum education requirement to be a voter.

#### **Registrar Training and Certification:**

We agree that Registrars should be trained to carry out their duties. This training should be provided by the Secretary of the State. In November 2014 approximately 40 new Registrars were elected to office. However, the Secretary's has not yet provided any training for these new Registrars that have been on the job for more than two months. We are grateful that our

professional association, the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC), provided new Registrars a full-day of Registrar training in early February. In the Town of Bethel we have two new Registrars, and if it were not for the ROVAC training, we would have been left at a disadvantage in administering our Special Election last month for the 107<sup>th</sup> Representative seat.

We support the proposal to have Secretary of State provide a certification training program for Registrars. This should have been implemented long ago.

In summary, we urge that you reject SB 1051 as it mandates that each town's legislative body appoint a single Registrar. We urge you to reject the SB 1051 requirement that Registrars hold a bachelor's degree. We encourage your support of a rigorous training and certification program for Registrars.

Thank you for your consideration

Respectfully submitted by



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Registrar



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Registrar