

To: Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila and Members of the GAE

I am writing in response to bill SB1051 and my opposition to it. This is a huge, unwarranted, unnecessary reaction to a small number of incidents involving registrars and elections.

I have been a Registrar of Voters (ROV) for over 11 years. In those 11 years the job has changed dramatically. Responsibilities have increased but the support most of us receive from our respective towns and the SOTS has not. We have gone from lever machines to tabulators, we now have same day voter registration, all changes I have welcomed. There are some new laws that I believe were enacted as just "feel good" legislation in response to perceived, wide spread problems and would not have altered the outcome or prevented it from happening.

I feel what is being proposed by SB1051 will have far-reaching, negative consequences. The appointment of one ROV by a municipal governing authority **will not** take the politics out of the position by taking it away from the town committees. After all, the people making the appointment received their nominations/jobs, from town committees. I would imagine most of you sitting here today received your start as a nomination from your town committee and thought it was entirely appropriate. My concern is that with any change of majority in the municipal governing authority, the appointment of ROV would be at the whim of the majority, which would result in a lack of continuity and knowledge. All you need to do is look at the massive amount of election law and what is expected of your election officials to know that changing ROV's on a whim is not in the best interest of elections.

As for one, non-partisan election official, I believe this is a non-starter. Who determines if someone is non-partisan, what constitutes a non-partisan person. Is there such a thing, and what makes you think that person will do a better job? This bill is requiring a degree, a degree in what? Are there problems between ROV's in some offices, yes, there are. But, I would argue that it is usually not based on political differences but more about personality, work ethics, and distribution of work. Even in those situations, most ROV's come together to perform their election duties. As for this new, non-partisan, appointed person working under the Town Clerk, I don't believe that is your answer. Many Town Clerks in Connecticut have been spending the past several years gladly giving/legislating their election responsibilities to the ROV's. Again, what makes a town clerk any more capable to handle elections? Is the bill assuming they are non-partisan, do they just appear on a ballot with no town committee backing?

Elected officials make mistakes all the time throughout the state, but they rarely get the bright, shining glare of the media that registrars receive when something goes wrong. I understand, our right to vote is sacred, enshrined in our constitution; it is who, and what we are as Americans. All the more reason to carefully consider a drastic overhaul of the system. The job of Registrar of Voters should be professionalized and respected in every way, including salary. Registrars may not put in a full week of

work but the responsibility of the job is enormous. All you have to do is look at Section 9 of your statutes to know that.

Professionalizing the ROV's is long overdue and should have been the priority of the SOTS. Where is the certification program? The two days a year of education provided by the SOTS is inadequate and usually redundant. Instead of throwing the ROV's under the bus, maybe we should be taught how to drive the bus. The staff is very good in the SOTS office but I believe that office may be underfunded and understaffed. As for the CVRS, it needs to be updated so we can depend on it being there when we need it. The whole day before the November 2014 election the system was down, you couldn't run a list if you wanted to. On Election Day, staff attorneys were calling our office asking us to log off CVRS if we were not using it because the system was being overloaded.

I believe there are ways to accomplish much of what you want by means other than a total overhaul of the system?

Please, have a mandatory, continuing certification/education program, update the infrastructure for the CVRS, look at the existing, outdated laws which have become obsolete due to new laws, educate the public and our elected officials on how important the job of ROV is and what they are responsible for, maybe then the Registrars of Voters in Connecticut will be respected and have the sense of self respect in their jobs they can take pride in.

No profession wants to be defined by the few who are not doing their jobs adequately and that includes Secretaries of State, Representatives, and Senators and First Selectman.

Respectfully,

Sue Spang

Salem, Registrar of Voters