



# DENISE W. MERRILL

SECRETARY OF THE STATE  
CONNECTICUT

## Judiciary Committee Public Hearing March 23, 2015

### Testimony on Senate Bill 1115, “An Act Concerning Wedding Officiants”

Chairman Coleman, Chairman Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee: for the record my name is Denise Merrill and I am Connecticut’s Secretary of the State. Today I am submitting written testimony about Senate Bill 1115, “AN ACT CONCERNING WEDDING OFFICIANTS.” This bill provides a means for Connecticut to allow people from out of state to perform wedding ceremonies here. You recall that I previously submitted testimony on a similar bill, Senate Bill 1086, “AN ACT CONCERNING PERSONS WHO ARE PERMITTED TO SOLEMNIZE MARRIAGES IN THIS STATE.” In that prior testimony, I also mentioned that the Office of the Secretary of the State provided language concerning this issue to you at the start of session. The three proposals vary.

The bill before you today differs from the others in that it sets up an entirely new process involving the Office of the Secretary of the State. It provides that any person “duly authorized by the Secretary of the State” may solemnize a marriage in Connecticut provided the person fills out a form with basic information and pays \$25.00. I have concerns about this bill as drafted.

First, the bill does not set any criteria to be applied by my office. Under current law, certain out of state persons who have a credential like being a judge or member of the clergy may perform a marriage ceremony. Senate Bill 1086 and my proposal essentially set up reciprocity; if you can perform a marriage ceremony in another state, you could perform one here. Under this bill “any person” may be authorized. It may be the desire of the committee to greatly expand who may solemnize a marriage; however, the bill would broaden out of state eligibility beyond in state eligibility.

Second, the bill requires that this office add a new process and record keeping function. This would entail a cost to the agency.

Third, the bill would expand the agencies involved in the marriage license and ceremony process. Under current law, the town clerk issues the license keeps a record of the certificate. The clerk sends a copy of the certificate to the Department of Public Health. Persons getting married who wish take advantage of this bill would have to involve the Office of the Secretary of the State in addition to the local clerk, adding additional time and steps to wedding planning. Perhaps the purpose of the bill could be carried out while maintaining a local procedure.

As I noted in my prior testimony, the primary aim here is to provide a legal means for two people committing themselves to each other in marriage to bring someone into Connecticut—who may have a special connection to the couple—to perform the ceremony. Some version of pending proposals will allow us to move forward and give couples more flexibility when planning their weddings. I would be happy to discuss the concerns I outlined here, and this concept generally, with the aim of drafting a workable bill in the weeks ahead. Thank you.