



**GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING MARCH 7, 2016**

**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB5514- AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR
VEHICLES AND AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION**

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and members of the GAE Committee, my name is Melissa Russell, and I am a registrar of voters in Bethlehem, as well as the president of the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC), and I am here today to speak in opposition to HB5514.

This bill aims to automatically register to vote anyone doing business with the Department of Motor Vehicles – whether it's getting a license, and identity card, or registering a vehicle. ROVAC's primary goal is to ensure that all elections are run fairly and efficiently, and it is our responsibility to ensure that eligible voters are able to register and to cast their ballots. With this in mind, we do not support the bill before the committee today, as we believe it raises more questions and concerns than it appears to solve.

First and foremost, the largest concern ROVAC has is the capability of the Department of Motor Vehicles to handle this additional task and their operation of the software that will need to be implemented to accomplish automatic registration. Currently, DMV has a limited role in voter registration. As registrars, we receive weekly DMV updates of people who have moved out of our towns, or moved within town. Those updates often contain errors, or are unavailable due to glitches in the current software. It leads us to wonder how much more those problems would be magnified by this increased workload. **We are not comfortable with relying further on the DMV for information of this importance.**

We have other, more specific concerns, however.

In Section 1, subsection (d), the proposal states in part that

"If any person who is not legally qualified to vote applies for admission as an elector...and is so admitted, such person's admission as an elector shall be presumed as having been effectuated with official authorization, and shall not constitute a violation of section 9-357."

And going further, (2) states in part that

"If any person who is not legally qualified to vote is admitted as an elector... and... votes or attempts to vote... such person's vote shall be presumed as having been cast with official authorization."

This is very troubling to us, as **it appears to allow non eligible persons to register and cast their votes if the automatic system somehow doesn't catch them as ineligible in the first place.** There also appears to be no remedy for this in the bill – what is the mechanism for removing that individual from the voter rolls once their ineligibility is discovered, and what is the mechanism that would prevent that person from becoming re-registered the next time they have a transaction with DMV?

We are also concerned about the impact of the potentially huge new influx of registered voters in our municipalities. With each new registration we have several tasks we must perform in relation to that registration: the printing of a voter registration card, the mailing of an acceptance letter, and canvassing the voter in the event of an address change. These tasks all have a cost associated with them, and **those costs would significantly increase with a large increase in the number of registered voters.**

There are other impacts of automatically registered voters: the likelihood of creating duplicate voters in our system increases if people do more than one transaction with DMV in a given year, is one. Another is that with such bloated lists of voters who never have any intention of voting, voter turnout percentages will be depressed on Election Day.

And finally, we feel that with so much new election technology still in the pipeline, and not yet implemented, **this is not the right time** – even in July of 2017, when this bill is proposed to take effect -- to embark upon a new, costly, and unproven system that can have such a big impact on our elections.

I thank you for your time and your continued leadership on all matters related to elections and their administration, and respectfully request that you do not move forward with this bill.