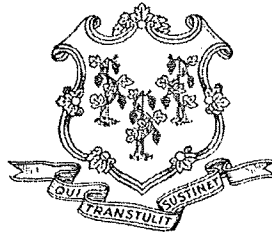


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Government Administration & Elections Committee
Public Hearing
February 22, 2017

Testimony of Sen. Mae Flexer in Support of
House Bill 5434, *An Act Adopting the Interstate Compact to Elect the President of the United States by National Popular Vote*
House Bill 6423, *An Act Extending the Hours of Election Day Registration*
House Bill 6575, *An Act Concerning Disclosure of Presidential Candidates' Federal Tax Returns*
House Bill 6576, *An Act Permitting Additional Polling Places at Institutions of Higher Education During Anticipated High-Turnout Elections*

Senator Winfield, Senator McLachlan, Representative Fox, and members of the Government Administration & Elections Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of proposed **House Bills 5434, 6423, 6575, and 6576.**

I will begin with **House Bill 6576**, which seeks to enhance the franchise of students at our colleges and universities by allowing for additional polling places on campuses.

It is well known that young people participate in elections at far lower rates than older voters, particularly college students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, participation for 18 to 24-year-olds is lower than all other age groups in every election. Participation for young voters is also more volatile, spiking in certain elections but dropping sharply in others.

Many college students do not know that they can re-register to vote using their campus address, or they fail to apply for an absentee ballot. Others who are registered in their home towns will not be able to travel home to vote on Election Day. Many students who live on their campuses lack access to transportation, and must travel a significant distance in order to vote. Students at the University of Connecticut in Mansfield are fortunate enough to have a polling place right next to campus, but the same is not true for students at Eastern Connecticut State University, who must travel over a mile off campus if they register in the Town of Windham.

HB 6576 also seeks to reduce wait times at polling places. For example, Mansfield has four polling places. Last November, three of those polling places experienced turnout ranging from 1,400 to 2,000 voters. The Mansfield Community Center, where UConn students vote, experienced turnout of more than 6,400 voters. Heavy turnout at the Community Center typically results in long lines that stretch outside the building at high traffic hours.

HB 6576 affords us a great opportunity to increase participation by young voters, making voting easier and more convenient for students, while also reducing wait times at polling places with significantly high numbers of registered student voters.

HB 6423 would permit individuals in line for Election Day registration prior to 8:00 p.m. to be allowed to apply and vote even after polls close. This change would simply mirror existing practice of allowing registered voters who are in line before 8:00 p.m. to vote even after polls close.

In this last election, I was inspired to see thousands of students from UConn and ECSU come out to vote, most for the very first time. Hundreds of others showed up to Mansfield and Windham town halls to register and vote on Election Day. Unfortunately, because the process to apply and vote is longer for these same-day registrants, the lines and wait times were significantly longer, and dozens of students still waiting to vote at 8:00 p.m. were turned away.

I believe this is wrong, and I believe that every individual that takes the time to vote should be permitted to do so if they are waiting in line to vote.

HB 6575 withholds ballot access from any candidate for President of the United States who does not release the previous three years' worth of federal tax returns. Like most Americans, I believe it is in the public interest that candidates release their tax returns to the public. Voters deserve to know what candidates claim about themselves is true, and tax returns are a singularly verifiable means of fact-checking those seeking the highest office in our land.

As a candidate for President, Donald Trump broke a tradition started with Richard Nixon by refusing to release his federal tax returns. His opponent, Hillary Clinton, and her husband, former President Bill Clinton, have released their tax returns every year since 1977. Mr. Trump claimed to be under audit, which prevented him from making his tax returns public. It's clear now that this was merely a delay tactic, and the President will likely never release his tax returns, despite overwhelming numbers of Americans who believe that he should—73 percent according to a CNN poll from October, and 74 percent according to an ABC News/Washington Post poll from last month.

Serious questions regarding the extent and nature of Donald Trump's businesses and foreign investments still remain unanswered, and will never be settled until he releases his taxes. Americans should have the confidence that any President or potential President is going to put the interests of the country first, not profits for their business or family, and that no conflicts of interest exist when she or he assumes office.

During the campaign, the President decried double-standards that afforded politicians special treatment. He was right then. Even if politicians will not hold themselves accountable, I believe Connecticut should, and HB 6575 is a step in that direction.

Finally, **HB 5434** would adopt the interstate compact to elect the President of the United States by national popular vote. Currently ten states and the District of Columbia have adopted the compact, comprising more than 30 percent of Electoral College votes, while legislation is pending in 17 states. The compact would only go into effect when the total Electoral votes of participating states exceeds 270.

This compact is based on a very simple proposition: the candidate who receives the most votes for President should win the Election. Twice in the last sixteen years we have elected a President that did not win a majority of the popular vote. Our current President was elected despite losing the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes.

The Electoral College system discourages participation in our national elections. When candidates invest their time and resources in only a few so-called "swing" states, voters elsewhere do not feel that their vote matters. We hear this all the time in Connecticut. When voters believe the election outcome in their state is a forgone conclusion, they regard their vote as unimportant, increasing the likelihood that they may not vote at all.

Entering into the compact will equalize the vote nationwide. The votes of individuals will be equal, and count more than the votes of states. Under the current system, the individual vote of a person in Wyoming, which has a population of less than 600,000, has 3.91 times more voting power than a voter in Florida, which has a population of almost 20 million.

Since last November's election, my office has received scores of emails from my constituents in support of electing our President by popular vote. I agree with them, and I believe strongly that we need to move beyond the antiquated and unfair Electoral College system, and entrust the election of our President to our people.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to take any questions that you may have.