



Town of Fairfield • Registrar of Voters Office
611 Old Post Road, Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

Testimony of Matthew Waggner, Registrar
(203) 256-3115 | mwaggner@fairfieldct.org

SUPPORT:

H.B. No. 5420 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING ADDITIONAL POLLING PLACES AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION DURING STATE ELECTIONS.

As a Registrar from a town with two institutions that would qualify, I'm most enthusiastic about this proposal. College students represent approximately three-quarters of Fairfield's unregistered adult population, and I'm always been looking for better ways to serve this mostly under-served population. However, the student population has some unique challenges - being unfamiliar with our election system in general, and most being prohibited from having cars in specific - so it's difficult to bridge the education and access gaps.

Our experience showed a 100% increase in students voting from 2012 to 2016, when we arranged for an Election Day Registration site on the Fairfield University campus. However, we were unable to accommodate a request from the similarly-sized Sacred Heart University for their own site, and faced a negative response from some local politicians about sending non-students to vote on campus. This policy would allow us to better serve our student population while addressing the concerns that arose when implementing this service.

As a technical recommendation, for very large campuses (UConn or Yale, for example), it may make sense to permit the legislative body to define multiple on-campus districts to service the disperse geography of these schools. Also, I would call your attention to the existing statute 9-272, which would seemingly permit a town to avoid the equipment costs associated with setting up an additional polling place.

SUPPORT:

**H.J. No. 28 RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO PERMIT EARLY VOTING.
S.J. No. 31 RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW EARLY VOTING.**

I support efforts to make absentee and early voting more widely available to residents. The restrictions in current law disenfranchise legitimate voters - 27% of those registered who missed the 2016 election did so because of travel or scheduling conflicts - while providing no benefit to election integrity. The availability of convenience voting in most states means that voters come to town hall expecting this service, and leave disappointed and without a convincing rationale for why they have to leave and wait in line another day.

However, I'd also like to share a practical case for expanding early voting: as we've faced election-season storms, including storm Sandy in 2012, voters in my shoreline community found themselves evacuated from their homes, but unable to swear under penalty of perjury that they would not be able to return on Election Day. We didn't know if the flooding would recede enough to open the polling places until just a couple days before the election, and for displaced voters, once it was clear that they wouldn't be back, it was also too late to have a ballot sent to them.

While other states made flexible arrangements for residents to cast ballots, our overly-prescriptive rules locked our residents out. Because of this experience, I'd ask you to consider removing the details concerning locations, hours, and minimum/maximum available dates from the amendment. Let experience, regulation, and statute guide us in getting this policy right - the Constitution is not the place to "ballpark" service levels for years to come.

SUPPORT:

S.B. No. 411 (RAISED) AN ACT EXTENDING THE HOURS OF ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION.

H.B. No. 5422 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING VOTING RIGHTS AND PRIMARY DAY ELECTOR REGISTRATION.

While it was the express view of the legislature that PA 12-56 permitted Election Day Registration voters in line at 8pm to vote, I appreciate your revisiting this subject and making this policy explicit. I also support extending the same EDR policy to primaries - as well as to all other types of elections - as uniformity in how we administer different election types provides a predictable experience for our constituents.

However, I would ask that you consider permitting party enrollment applications to be submitted at the polling place: each polling place has "Assistant Registrars" who already review and accept voter changes. Requiring voters who find out that they're not in a party to go to a different location to vote is a senseless waste of time, and incurs additional costs for our offices with no corresponding benefit to voters.

Candidly, I believe strongly that the public and our offices would be best served by processing EDR applications for all elections at the regular polling places. I understand the legislature's intent in providing an additional "check" against double-voting, but this could be accomplished in a much less costly manner by simply performing this check the following day, contacting other Registrars to confirm this information instead of interrupting polling places across the state. Further, eliminating the single-location requirement would eliminate the substantial wait times experienced in larger towns.

MODIFY:

S.B. No. 410 (RAISED) AN ACT CREATING EFFICIENCIES AND REDUCING CONFUSION IN STATUTES CONCERNING ELECTIONS.

This bill primarily concerns petition eligibility, and while the author clearly appreciates the impracticality of the "last completed list" standard, this bill would prohibit new applicants from signing petitions, which would curtail an important source of voter registration activity - namely, petitioning campaigns. In places with more transient populations, where motor vehicle updates and postal address changes reach a lower share of the people, people campaigning at grocery stores and going door-to-door to get signatures provide valuable updates, getting hard-to-reach voters on the list and ultimately reducing Election Day workloads. I would recommend that you provide the clarity sought by the bill by basing the number of signatures required on the active list as of the date when petitions are requested, and permitting any voter who has enrolled by the date the petitions are due to be counted.

With respect to audit selection dates, I believe it's important for the audited districts to be announced after the last date to file amended returns. Knowing for certain that a particular district will not be audited - which a 72 hour deadline would do - would permit official tampering to go undetected, defeating an important purpose of the audit.

SUPPORT: H.B. No. 5418 (RAISED) AN ACT RESTORING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES TO FELONY CONVICTS WHO ARE ON PAROLE.

I support this measure both from the perspective that participating in the electoral process is an important part of being integrated in the community, and from the practical perspective that the "parole and restitution" restrictions generate confusion for the prospective voter. If you advance this measure, you might also consider adding parole officers to the list of designated voter registration agencies, who could supply a voter registration form directly to the former convict at the correct time whether or not you change the eligibility to include parolees.

MODIFY: S.B. No. 409 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRIMARY DATE FOR OFFICES TO BE VOTED UPON AT CERTAIN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

Please consider a technical correction – that “a municipal election held in November” instead read “a regular municipal election held in November as defined in 9-164(a).” The draft language could produce unintended consequences for special or adjourned elections.

OPPOSE: S.B. No. 430, Sec 10 (RAISED) AN ACT UPDATING STATUTES REGARDING ELECTIONS.

I oppose Section 10, which eliminates the advisory committee that develops training programs for Registrars. This committee includes Registrars, and has a great deal of work ahead in updating the certification program to reflect new laws, to address continuing education needs, and to reshape the certification program when the annual volume of students is no longer sufficient to sustain the minimum class sizes required by UConn.

OPPOSE: S.B. No. 412 (RAISED) AN ACT ELIMINATING REGIONAL ELECTION MONITORS.

While I would agree that the Regional Election Monitors have been given a poorly-defined charge and essentially no resources, a state elections staff providing on the ground services around the state can play a necessary and missing role in ensuring that policy is implemented uniformly and in anticipating and managing crises. However, this requires proper civil service positions and the kind of professional development that cannot be produced in a short time with minimal funding. I would suggest that this committee consult with the REMs and develop a serious plan and timetable to provide the service you had originally intended.

OPPOSE: S.B. No. 5419 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CENTRAL COUNTING OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS

While I submitted more extensive testimony on this issue last session (HB 5529), this proposal would incur additional costs associated with ballot printing and memory card programming, result in election returns taking hours longer to complete, and diminish election integrity by ensuring that absentee and Election Day Registration ballots in towns impacted by the measure are never audited – with no benefit whatsoever to voters.