

Government Administration and Elections Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5420

AN ACT REQUIRING ADDITIONAL POLLING PLACES AT INSTITUTIONS OF

Title: HIGHER EDUCATION DURING STATE ELECTIONS.

Vote Date: 3/23/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/15/2018

File No.: 440

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To make voting for college students more accessible by requiring a separate voting district for state election years to be located on Connecticut's larger college campuses and universities.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Denise Merrill, Secretary of the State, Connecticut

Secretary Merrill supports the concept of requiring polling places to be located on the campuses of Connecticut's larger colleges and universities during state elections. The Secretary's office is working to improve the feasibility of the concept with the proponents of the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Martin Looney, State Senator

Senator Looney cites that increased voter participation is good for our democracy. College students are unique in that they live near or on campus and many are without reliable transportation and unfamiliar with the surrounding town outside campus. It makes sense that we make college campuses a place where students can cast their votes because they spend all of their time there and would make voting more accessible.

Matthew Waggnar, Registrar of Voters, Town of Fairfield

Mr. Waggnar supports the proposal to require additional polling places at institutions of higher education during state elections. He states that college students represent $\frac{3}{4}$ of Fairfield's

unregistered adult population. Many of the students are unfamiliar with the election system and many do not have cars for transportation to polls outside campus.

The Town of Fairfield saw a 100% increase in students voting from 2012 to 2016 when the town arranged for an Election Day Registration site on the Fairfield University campus. The town was unable to accommodate a similar site at Sacred Heart University and some locals did not like sending non-students to a campus to vote. Mr. Waggner believes that HB 5420 would help them serve the student population and also address concerns that the larger community had.

Finally, he makes a technical recommendation, for very large campuses (UConn or Yale) “to permit the legislative body to define multiple on-campus districts to service the disperse geography of these schools.” And he also notes the existing statute 9-272, which would seemingly permit a town to avoid the equipment costs associated with setting up an additional polling place.

Yvonne Senturia, Election Law Specialist, League of Women Voters of Connecticut, Inc.

The League of Women Voters supports maximizing voter participation but believes that expanding the number of polling place should be **voluntary**, rather than required.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Sue Larsen, South Windsor Registrar of Voters, ROVAC President

Ms. Larsen is concerned with the language “additional” polling places. She argues that this would be an additional cost to municipalities and that Registrars of Voters would have to purchase additional equipment and hire and train poll workers. Additionally, because the bill mandates these polling locations only during state elections, each year the Registrar of Voters would need to notify voters of polling location changes which would be costly.

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM)

Believes the bill would be an unfunded mandate on towns and cities. Additionally, establishing a new polling location may be an administrative burden for registrars of voters.

CCM believes that there is no evidence that voter turnout at college campuses will improve if the proposal became law and notes that any municipality can create a new polling location currently under statute.

Michael Iannazzi, Vice President for Marketing and Communications, Sacred Heart University

The bill would be a financial and logistical burden on institutions and municipalities. While Sacred Heart supports making it easier for students to vote, the University encourages them to register and/or obtain absentee ballots from their home state. They do not feel that it should be mandated that there be a polling place on campus, but is happy to work with the town to assist students in the voting process.

Reported by: Susan Tufts

Date: 4/15/18

