

# Connecticut Town Clerks Association, Inc.

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## Written Testimony

Mark H. Bernacki, New Britain Town & City Clerk  
Connecticut Town Clerks Association

**Oppose – SJ 27, No Excuse Absentee Voting**

**Support – HJ 161, Early Voting and No Excuse Absentee Voting**

**Support - SB 1047, Ballot Access for Petitioning Candidates**

**Support with modifications – HB 7324 – Circulators of Nominating & Circulating Petitions**

**Support with modifications – SB 1049 – Modern Elections**

**Support – SB 1050 – Study Committee to Evaluate Ranked Voting**

**Support – SB 1036 – Study Committee to Evaluate Regionalism of Elections**

Government Administration & Elections Committee

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson and Representative France, and the members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony. My name is Mark Bernacki, I am the Legislative Chair of the Connecticut Town Clerks Association and the Town Clerk of New Britain.

### **SJ 27 – No Excuse Absentee Ballot Voting – Oppose**

### **HJ 161 – Early Voting and No Excuse Absentee Voting – Support**

CTCA **strongly opposes** any Constitutional question that solely seeks to expand the absentee ballot to a no excuse system. Over the years, CTCA consistently states whether it's in meetings or public hearings, no excuse absentee ballot voting will lead to the disenfranchisement of Connecticut voters. Under current law, approximately 5-percent of absentee ballot voters are disenfranchised when their ballots are rejected for various reasons such as: failure to place ballot in the inner envelope, failure to sign, putting two ballots in one envelope, over voting, and late arrival of ballot.

If no excuse absentee ballot voting were to become the law, the voter disenfranchisement percentage would most certainly rise.

For these reasons, CTCA would support a Constitutional question that ties no excuse absentee ballot voting with a proposal that would permit “in-person early voting by tabulator” on designated days prior to Election Day. By providing in-person early voting by tabulator you provide the voter with multiple opportunities to cast their ballot and ensuring that it will be counted. Absentee ballots would be used by those voters that are truly absent on Election Day or are unable to vote early by tabulator. This will ensure the fewest number of individuals will be disenfranchised.

CTCA is committed to ensuring the integrity and efficiency of our elections and will continue to provide thoughtful and insightful feedback to this committee and the Secretary of the State on these important issues.

#### **SB 1047 – Ballot Access for Petitioning Candidates**

CTCA supports this bill as it requires registrar of voters and town clerks to notify petitioning candidates DAILY of the number of petitions and signatures that have been received and verified. CTCA agrees that petitioning candidates should know where they stand regarding the number of verified signatures. Given the tight timeframes of collecting and then verifying the signatures, an easy to use method of communication is strongly recommended.

#### **HB 7324 – Circulators of Nominating & Circulating Petitions**

This bill is in conflict with **SB 915** that CTCA recently testified on at a February 27<sup>th</sup> public hearing. SB 915 seeks to eliminate the submission by circulators of nominating petitions directly to the Secretary of the State. At the hearing on SB 915 both CTCA and Secretary Merrill testified in support of the suggested changes in sections 2 and 3 of SB 915. With these changes delays in processing will be reduced due to this more efficient procedure. If this bill moves forward, SB 915 should be incorporated into this proposal.

#### **SB 1049 – Modern Elections**

CTCA comments are confined to section 2 of SB 1049 which seeks to establish an online system for a person to register to distribute absentee ballot applications for election, primary or referendum. CTCA recommends that great care should be given when allowing for the mass distribution of absentee ballot applications. There needs to be a system of checks and balances in place to ensure the validity of each absentee ballot request. Creating ease and efficiency through an online system is a laudable goal, but the system also needs to maintain the integrity of each and every vote.

#### **SB 1050 – Ranked Voting**

CTCA appreciates the inclusion of two town clerks on a working group to study the feasibility of implementing ranked-choice voting in Connecticut. We look forward to our active participation in this study.

#### **SB 1036 – Regionalism of Elections**

CTCA appreciates the inclusion of two town clerks on this study group to look at the regionalization of election administration.