OLR Bill Analysis
SB 156

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE AND ABSENTEE VOTING.

SUMMARY

Beginning July 1, 2019, this bill allows certain individuals to apply for absentee ballot applications online through a system that the Office of the Secretary of the State must establish and maintain. Currently, individuals may apply for absentee ballots only to the town clerk in the municipality where they are registered to vote or have applied to register.

Under the bill, an individual may apply for an absentee ballot online only if his or her signature is already available in one of the databases that the secretary’s office uses to cross reference information for online voter registration applications (e.g., the Department of Motor Vehicles) and the signature can be imported to the online system (see BACKGROUND). In order for an application to be submitted through the online absentee ballot application system, the (1) applicant’s signature must be obtained through one of the online voter registration databases and (2) applicant must fill out a secretary-prescribed form under penalty of false statement in absentee balloting.

After receiving an absentee ballot application through the online system, the secretary of the state must transmit it to the appropriate town clerk. By law, the penalty for false statement in absentee balloting is a class D felony, punishable by up to five years in prison, up to a $5,000 fine, or both (CGS § 9-359a).

The bill also makes technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2019

APPLICATION FORM
Under the bill, applicants must fill out an online, secretary of the state-prescribed form in which they (1) type their name, (2) indicate the municipality in which they are eligible to vote or have applied to vote, and (3) mark a box associated with the following statement:

"By clicking on the box below, I swear or affirm all of the following under penalty of false statement in absentee balloting:

1. I am the person whose name is provided on this form, and I desire to apply for an absentee ballot.

2. I am eligible to vote in the municipality provided on this form or have applied for such eligibility.

3. I authorize the Department of Motor Vehicles or other Connecticut state agency to transmit to the Connecticut Secretary of the State my signature that is on file with such agency and understand that such signature will be used by the Secretary on this online application for an absentee ballot as if I had signed this form personally."

BACKGROUND

Online Voter Registration System

By law, the secretary of the state maintains an online voter registration system. The system permits (1) registered voters to apply to change their registration information or (2) new applicants to apply to register to vote.

Applicants may register to vote online if their (1) registration information is verifiable and (2) signature is in a federal or state database and may be imported into the system. To effectuate the importing of signatures, the law requires state agencies to provide information to the secretary of the state, at her request, that she deems necessary to maintain the online system. The secretary may use any state or federal government database, or another state's voter registration database, to cross reference and verify applicants' information.
In order for an online voter registration or change in registration to be approved, applicants must authorize DMV or another Connecticut state agency to transmit their on-file signature to the secretary of the state or applicable registrar of voters (CGS § 9-19k).

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 10  Nay 6  (03/20/2019)