Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-266
Title: AN ACT REQUIRING POLLING PLACES AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/29/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

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REASONS FOR BILL:
Hotly contested elections tend to bring out large groups of college student voters. The intent of this bill is to have polling places on college and university campuses to make voting easier for those students.

**Substitute Language LCO 6724:** In Section 1 (b), the word “shall” is substituted by “may” with regards to setting up a polling place on a college or university campus. This gives municipalities the option of setting up a polling place on a campus, rather than requiring them to do so.

**RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Denise Merrill, Secretary of the State:** testified that she looks forward to working with the proponents of this bill to flesh out the actual feasibility of this concept with regards to campuses that span multiple towns, how towns receive notice of the need for a polling place on campus, and the cost of such polling places.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**David McGuire, Executive Director, ACLU-CT:** testified that more people would have the opportunity to vote with this legislation, and stated that many long lines were found in 2018 to be in New Haven and Mansfield. He further stated that this would be an increase in convenience to students, as they could vote between classes.

**Yvonne Senturia, League of Women Voters of CT:** testified that reduced wait times to vote lead to increased voter participation and access. She further stated that she believes that having a polling place on a campus should be voluntary for smaller institutions.

**Cheri Quickmire, Common Cause in CT:** testified that by having polling places on campuses, the trend of increasing voter turnout among young adults would be encouraged. She cited some statistics that stated that Connecticut had the 7th highest increase in voting rates during this past election.

**Emily O’Hara, Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (Conn PIRG):** testified that college students often don’t have transportation to off-campus locations to get to a polling place, and that they are still building regular voting habits, so that giving them more voting opportunities will create lifetime voters. She stated that having campus polling locations would ensure that more young people participate in the electoral process.

**Sean Foley, New Haven:** testified that based on 2015 numbers, 10 state institutions would qualify for an on-campus polling location, and with private campuses such as Yale and Fairfield University being included, many more students would have an easier and more convenient method of voting.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC):** testified that although CCIC supports and encourages civic engagement among its students, they don’t support the mandatory creation of a polling place at institutions of higher learning with more than 3000 full-time students. They believe this would be a problem with the
institutions being able to provide an appropriate area that would also be easily accessible to the general public, especially when classes are taking place. She further stated that the difficulties of navigating a campus may actually discourage people from voting.

M. Randall Collins Jr., Connecticut Conference on Municipalities (CCM): testified that passage of this legislation would be a costly unfunded mandate on the towns and cities that host colleges and universities. He stated concerns with campuses meeting ADA requirements, and having enough parking available. He further posed whether or not these locations would be required for all elections, just state elections, or local budget referenda.

Reported by: Melissa Russell
Assistant Clerk

Date: 4/9/2019