



## GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

### **Testimony for Raised Bill No HB 5883 AA Concerning Voting for Municipal Officers and on Local Questions.**

Good Afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of the Committee.

My name is Annalisa Stravato, I am the Republican Registrar of Voters for Wilton and the Vice President of ROVAC. I am here today to discuss HB 5883 An Act Concerning Voting for Municipal Officers and on Local Questions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

This bill would allow those people who have attained the age of at least 16 years but who are not yet 18 years old, if the municipality adopts an appropriate ordinance, the right to vote in certain municipal elections for all elected municipal offices, as well as to vote on issues involving local questions, although not specifically stated in the proposed bill I assume would include votes on local budget and bonding referendums, as well as charter revision questions.

ROVAC opposes this legislation for a variety of reasons.

First, and while not necessarily an issue related to Registrars, our CVRS system does not currently allow for a Registrar to enroll any person who is under the age of 18 or who is 17 and not turning 18 prior to election day of that year. While this is a system coding issue, the Secretary of the State's office would have to upgrade the system to allow for the registration of voters under the age of 18, and since it will be on a town by town basis, and not uniform across the state, the possibility of confusion and improper enrollments are possible. We know, after this past election with the mailing of AB applications to all registered voters that our voter list is not the most pristine and, in some cases, needs a great deal of clean up. The Secretary and our Registrars across the state are working diligently to improve our list, but this has the potential to lead to further issues.

Second, the bill calls on the Registrar's to ensure that proper ballots are given those under 18 years of age. This has the potential to increase costs to towns. An example that should be considered, the special election for a state representative or senator that, in order to save towns money, is called for the November election day in odd years. Would the Registrar's office have

to print special ballots that include only the municipal candidates for those under 18 and a different ballot for those 18 and older?

ROVAC has questions related to Section 2 of the bill, the definitions.

Subsection (n) the definition of Referendum seems to indicate that a person who is 16 or 17 would not be allowed to participate in a town meeting, but would be allowed to vote in an election called from a town meeting. In Wilton, our Town Meeting meets to discuss and vote on the budget, in which people who are in attendance at the meeting cast a vote, the meeting is then adjourned to a date and time for other voters to vote on the budget. It seems that a 16 or 17 year old could not participate in the town meeting portion of our proceeding, which is also where citizens can verbally express themselves on the budget but a 16 or 17 year old could come to the polls to vote on the budget. This seems to be inconsistent and would also require different ballots for the town meeting and for voting day.

Section 3 of the bill amends Section 9-372, again, a definitional section. Subsection 7 of 9-372 defines the term "municipal office". While most all municipal offices are voted on during the odd number year municipal election, the office of Registrar of Voters, which is a municipal office is voted on in the even number years. Would a 16 and 17 year old be allowed to vote for Registrar, the person charged with ensuring their voting rights, in a state election? Since they can vote in a party primary, they therefore can be registered with a political party. Can a 16-17 year old vote in a town committee primary? Can they be elected to a town committee and if so, if nominations for state representative or state senator are done by town committee endorsement, can they participate in the nomination of candidates for state representative or state senator. Can a 16-17 year old hold an election official position during a municipal election, including that of moderator or assistant moderator?

Section 1 subsection (c) states that the Registrar must ensure that a 16-17 year old only get a ballot which permits them to vote in conformance with the provisions of the bill. This seems to contemplate that a 16 or 17 year old could require a ballot that is different than those used by voters 18 and older. If so, does this require a separate tabulator to cast those votes, does it require additional memory card programming?

Members of the Committee, we see this bill causing confusion and misunderstanding about elections at a time when we need to eliminate the confusion and make our elections more transparent. Allowing towns on an individual basis to decide whether 16 and 17 year old can vote will, in ROVAC's opinion, cause confusion. Imagine if the City of Norwalk adopts such an ordinance but Wilton and Westport do not. Kids, as well as parents, interact across town lines. I can see a scenario where 16 and 17 year olds show up at a Wilton or Westport polling place wanting to vote because their friends in Norwalk have told them they can vote in the election. Imagine a 16 or 17 year old who moves from a town that adopted the bill to a town that opted out. Moderators will have to deal with this confusion and, as we have learned, often times these discussions in polling places become, shall we say, animated. As Registrars, it is our job to ensure that our polling places are free of distraction.

These are some of the technical questions that do not seem to be answered in the bill and which will cause confusion at a time when we need our elections to become more transparent and less confusing.

I'd also like to speak to you as mother of 3, my youngest of which graduated high school in 2019.

As Senator Haskell and Representative Thomas know all too well, over the past year, Wilton has had to deal with teen losses attributed to depression, isolation, and bullying. Unfortunately, Wilton is not the only town in our state to deal with these types of losses. These are losses that no one should have to endure let alone a parent. I would ask that his board take a step back and understand the enormous pressure that would come with giving a child the adult responsibility of voting. While we want to believe that 16 & 17 years are young adults and capable of making adult decisions, they really are still children, and teenage children at that, dealing with all of the issues that teenagers today have to deal with, most of which come from misinformation on social media sites. Unfortunately, our children are being bullied and intimidated over so many issues which now includes, unfortunately, political beliefs and affiliation. A few years ago, a group of students at Wilton High School wanted to start a High School Republican club. They wanted to be involved politically and work to improve our political and governmental systems. They were harassed and intimidated, not only by other students, but by adults as well, for simply wanting to start a political club and get involved in their community. Imagine what will happen to those who choose to affiliate with a political party when their peers and others with authority of them, don't agree with that affiliation.

But beyond bullying from peer groups, in order to register to vote, a 16 or 17 year old would have to provide their name, address, gender, date of birth, possibly a phone (cell) number and, as well as social security number or driver's license number, both of which, as you know, are suppressed on the public voter information file.

If anyone in this room were to go to their local Board of Education and ask for personal information about students, such as name, their address, their date of birth, their gender, the Board of Education would tell you that information is confidential. Now, any person who wishes to do harm to a 16 or 17 year old, who wants to exploit them, stalk them, cause them problems, simply has to file an FOI request with the Registrar's office and we are required to provide all public information about voters to them. If you choose to protect this information from disclosure, how would a candidate know how to contact these voters to communicate with them and seek their support?

While ROVAC shares the goal of the General Assembly in wanting to get young people more involved in our political and governmental processes, we do not believe that this is the best way to accomplish that goal. It is fraught with technical and election issues which, after the 2020 election, we are all working to minimize; but more importantly, it could very well put these 16 and 17 year old children at great risk. Information that is now not accessible from any other governmental agency about these children will be readily available with a simple FOIA request to the Registrar of Voters.

ROVAC strongly urges that this bill be rejected, and we ask that the leadership of the Committee, together with the Secretary of the State sit down with us to develop ways to get our youth more involved in our political and governmental process without putting them in danger and without creating more election and voting issues.

I thank this committee for their time and consideration.