



**GAE Committee
Public Hearing
March 19, 2021**

TESTIMONY OF SECRETARY OF THE STATE DENISE W. MERRILL REGARDING:

- **S.B. No. 883, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS**
- **H.B. No. 5872, AN ACT EXPANDING AUTOMATIC APPLICATION FOR VOTER REGISTRATION TO CERTAIN STATE AGENCIES**

Good morning Chairmen Fox and Flexer, Vice Chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and members of the committee. My name is Denise Merrill and I am the Secretary of the State of Connecticut. I would like to address several bills before the committee.

- **S.B. No. 883, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS**

Our government works best when it reflects all of us. Diversity in our government, including on our boards and commissions, improves the quality of our services, encourages better policy decisions, and promotes the public's trust in our government. My office is responsible for receiving diversity reports from state boards and commissions, I am committed to helping to increase the diversity of those boards and commissions in any way I can.

Although clear progress has been made over the last ten years, according to the most recent report prepared by my office, on the reporting boards and commissions, men still make up 57% of the membership, despite making up only 49% of the population, and women are underrepresented making up 43% of the membership of boards and commissions despite being

51% of the Connecticut population. Similarly, the only racial group that is overrepresented on the membership of Connecticut's boards and commissions is white, non-Hispanic members who make up 78% of the membership and only 67% of the population. Every other racial group is underrepresented based on their proportion in Connecticut's population with the most glaring discrepancy being Hispanic members of all races – 17% of the population and only 4% of the makeup of Connecticut's boards and commissions. 11% of Connecticut's boards and commissions are made up of members of a single race and gender. The full report can be found here: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SOTS/Education/DiversityReport/2020-Report-on-Gender-and-Racial-Diversity-on-Connecticut-State-Boards-and-Commissions.pdf>

Connecticut still has a long way to go until the makeup of our boards and commissions resembles the rich diversity of our people. I support sections 5 and 6 of S.B. No. 883, **AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND GIRLS.**

- **H.B. No. 5872, AN ACT EXPANDING AUTOMATIC APPLICATION FOR VOTER REGISTRATION TO CERTAIN STATE AGENCIES**

H.B. No. 5872, **AN ACT EXPANDING AUTOMATIC APPLICATION FOR VOTER REGISTRATION TO CERTAIN STATE AGENCIES** is identical in concept to sections 2 and 3 in H.B. No. 6578, **AN ACT CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**, a bill I proposed and is the culmination of years of work with advocates, the Office of the Governor, and advocates to get language that met the policy goals of making voter registration automatic at certain state agencies. The JFS language that was provided to the committee for H.B. 6578 is the language that should be used in any bill that is voted on in committee.

Since Automatic Voter Registration implementation was begun administratively in August of 2016, more than 550,000 new Connecticut voters have used Automatic Voter Registration at the DMV to register, and more than 700,000 voters have made changes to their registrations. In addition to easing registration, Automatic Voter Registration also provides local election officials with more up to date information, leading to cleaner, more accurate voter rolls. Codifying, streamlining, and expanding this process will make it even easier for eligible voters to register and will significantly expand the number of voters who are able to cast their ballots and make their voices heard on Election Day.

I support this concept.

Section 1(b)(2)(C) of this bill, however, creates a presumption that a voter who changes their party affiliation from one party to another or to no party at all has done so unintentionally. This seems to be a reaction to an issue that arose at the Department of Motor Vehicles roughly four years ago when confusing voter registration forms caused some voters to unintentionally remove their party affiliation. This problem was swiftly solved by redesigning the voter registration forms and was permanently fixed by the rollout of the Automatic Voter Registration hardware to all DMV locations. Leaving aside that the problem this section seeks to solve is no longer a problem, in this case the cure is worse than the disease. Some people leave political parties

intentionally – this section would prevent them from doing that at any of the covered Automatic Voter Registration state agencies. Voters must have the choice to choose a party, to choose no party at all, or to choose to leave a party to which they once belonged. Section 1(b)(2)(C) limits voters' choices and locks them in to a political party, even after they believe they have changed their affiliation.

I cannot support this section.

Thank you.