

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6211

AN ACT CONCERNING GENDER AND RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CERTAIN STATE APPOINTIVE BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES AND COUNCILS AND AN ONLINE SYSTEM FOR CONSIDERATION OF

Title: APPOINTMENTS WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT.

Vote Date: 3/31/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/24/2021

File No.: 499

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to achieve gender and racial diversity on state boards, commissions, committee and councils. Starting after January 1, 2025, appointing authorities will use the most recent data provided by the United States Census Bureau Equal Employment Opportunity Tabulation in order to ensure that appointed individuals reflect the gender and racial diversity of the state. In addition, this bill calls upon the Department of Administrative Services to develop public education and expand outreach efforts to help increase awareness and solicit diverse applicants for appointed positions. Another provision of this bill would mandate the Joint Committee on Legislative Management to create and maintain an accessible website where individuals can submit names to be considered for an appointment to a board, commission, council or other appointed body within the Legislative Department.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Kate Farrar, State Representative, 20th District and Dorinda Borer, State

Representative, 115th District: Reps. Farrar and Borer offered testimony in support of this legislation. They cited population demographics, including the fact that women account for 51.2% of the population in Connecticut, and people of color make up 36.5% of our state population. Over the last 20 years, women's representation on government appointed bodies has increased by just 9%. Reps. Farrar and Borer identified the fact that white individuals make up 78% of appointees. They contend that Hispanic individuals are the most

underrepresented population in terms of membership on state boards and commissions. Reps. Farrar and Borer believe that improving diversity will represent the interests of Connecticut residents better, add different and valuable perspectives, protect against groupthink and overall result in the inclusion of all people.

State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO): CHRO believes that this bill would ensure that all viewpoints would be represented in the policy making process. CHRO supports the good faith effort that this bill makes to include people from various racial and gender backgrounds.

Department of Administrative Services (DAS): The Department of Administrative Services outlined the provisions in the bill that would require them to develop public education and outreach strategies to help solicit diverse applicants for board and commission positions. DAS stated that this undertaking would require substantial resources, since they do not typically partake in the appointments process. DAS made clear that they have been working with the Council on Women and Girls' working group to develop strategies that ensure that all affirmative action plans are based on the most recent Census Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) tabulation data. By relying on the most recent Census EEO data, state employment will best reflect the most recent demographic trends.

Denise W. Merrill, Secretary of the State of Connecticut: Secretary Merrill stated that government works best when it reflects all voices. That being said, she contends that diversifying boards and commissions will improve government efficiency, result in better policy decisions, and ultimately help to promote public trust in government. The Secretary of the State's office is charged with preparing diversity reports for the state. According to the most recent report, men are overrepresented on boards and commissions, holding 57% of the seats, despite making up only 49% of the population. Women are underrepresented, holding 43% of appointed seats, despite being 51% of the population. With racial groups, white, non-hispanic groups are overrepresented, holding 78% of all seats, even though white, non-hispanic groups make up only 67% of the population. Hispanic members are the most underrepresented group in terms of Connecticut boards and commissions. Based on most recent data, Hispanics make up 17% of our state population, but only 4% of all appointed positions. Secretary Merrill believes that this bill would help Connecticut get on the right track to ensure that Connecticut's boards and commissions represent all demographics in the state.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Sharon Baanante, Co-Founder, Norwalk Women Who Vote: Norwalk Women Who Vote expressed support for this bill. Their testimony cited the fact that Norwalk's population is 51% women and 47% people of color, however, the municipal boards, commissions and the Common Council do not reflect those demographics. Norwalk Women Who Vote state that Norwalk's situation is not an anomaly, as women, particularly women of color, are significantly underrepresented in government seats. Norwalk Women Who Vote cited studies that have proven that diversity improves results. This legislation would help to improve our state economically, environmentally and socially.

Jason Chang: Mr. Chang is a member of the West Hartford Board of Education and has conducted faculty hiring searches at the University of Connecticut. Based on his experience, he says that the best way to get the most excellent candidates for a job is to have an extremely diverse applicant pool. He attributes diversity to creativity, attentiveness to any issues, and better problem solving skills. Mr. Change contends that broader participation from underrepresented communities is required if Connecticut wants to address and root out systemic racism. He cites the fact that Asian Americans make up 4.9% of the state's population but hold just 1.7% of all appointed seats.

Adrienne Cochrane, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hartford Region: YWCA Hartford Region's testimony put emphasis on the need for women of color to have a seat at the table where major policy decisions are made. To achieve this goal, YWCA Hartford Region recommends that public education and outreach efforts to marginalized communities be instituted to help recruit minority individuals for appointments to state boards or commissions. YWCA Hartford Region believes that more equitable outcomes will be reached if diverse voices are taking part in the policy making process.

Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Sierra Club CT: Sierra Club CT expressed support for this bill, which would help to bring gender and racial equality on our state boards and commissions. Sierra Club CT relied on statistics provided by a report issued by the Secretary of the State. In Connecticut, men consist of 57% of all members on boards and commissions, despite only making up 49% of the population. Women and non-white racial groups are significantly underrepresented in Connecticut's boards and commissions. In fact, Sierra Club made note of the fact that 11% of all boards and commissions in Connecticut are made up of a single race and gender. Sierra Club CT urged the Committee to support the bill and address these disparities.

Dominique Johnson: Ms. Johnson highlighted the importance of requiring all appointing authorities to report data on gender and racial diversity to the Secretary of the State every five years. Citing the report issued in 2020, Ms. Johnson states that women and people of color are still significantly underrepresented. Ms. Johnson believes that efforts to diversify institutions that have been dominated by one race or one gender are often met with unclear expectations and a lack of an established timeline. Setting goals with benchmarks is an appropriate measure of progress. Ms. Johnson also acknowledged the critical importance of expanding public education and outreach efforts to recruit more diverse efforts. She also expressed support for the creation of a website that is easier to navigate for those wishing to become a member of a board or commission in Connecticut.

Judy Lhamon, Public Issues Vice President, League of Women Voter of Connecticut (LWVCT): The League of Women Voters of Connecticut expressed strong support for HB 6211. LWVCT was supportive of the efforts to diversify boards and commissions with qualified individuals to accurately represent gender and racial demographics in Connecticut. These demographics would be provided by the most recent federal decennial Census. Additionally, LWVCT made note of the provision in the bill that would require the Joint Committee on Legislative Management to establish an online system to solicit names of individuals who should be considered for appointments to state boards and commissions. LWVCT was supportive of these measures as well.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Trevor Hoffman

Date: 3-31-21