

Government Administration and Elections Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Friday, January 22, 2021

1:00 PM in Zoom and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM by Chairman, Rep. Fox D. 148.

The following committee members were present:

Senators: Flexer M. S29; Haskell W. S26; McCrory D. S02; Sampson R. S16;  
Slap D. S05

Representatives: Blumenthal M. 147; Carpino C. 032; Fishbein C. 090; Fox D. 148;  
France M. 042; Haddad G. 054; Labriola D. 131; Mastrofrancesco  
G. 080; McCarthy Vahey C. 133; Morrin Bello A. 028; Palm C. 036;  
Rosario C. 128; Santiago H. 084; Thomas S. 143

Absent were:

Senators:

Representatives:

Rep. Fox convened the meeting at 1:00 PM.

Sen. Sampson expressed opposition to the Zoom meeting structure. Citing technical difficulties, unequal demographic accessibility to technology and unfamiliarity with virtual platforms, Sen. Sampson believes Zoom meetings disenfranchise the public from participating in government. He also raised concerns with the executive orders issued by Governor Lamont. Sen. Sampson stated that once the executive orders expire in February, members of the General Assembly must decide whether the Governor or the legislature should be running the state.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco raised concerns because concepts on the agenda were not discussed during a screening session. Rep. Mastrofrancesco hopes that the committee will be able to keep communication open between committee leaders to discuss agenda items. She asked that concepts on the agenda be accompanied with a brief summary during this meeting.

Rep. Fox stated his intent is to make the committee as transparent as possible. He added that there has yet to be a screening session because the committee is waiting to receive additional proposed bills to be screened together. Rep. Fox announced that the clerk will circulate bills to be reviewed by the committee leadership, followed by a discussion of the bills and a timeline for committee meetings and hearings.

Rep. Fox moved to Section IV of the agenda, Concepts to be Raised:

1. Resolution Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 1.

Rep. Santiago made the motion and it was seconded by Sen. McCrory.

Rep. Fox opened discussion of concept 1 to members of the committee.

Rep. Fishbein expressed concerns regarding the nonoccurrence of a screening session for the items on the agenda.

Rep. Fox acknowledged that all the concepts coming before the committee in Section IV of the agenda are items proposed by state agencies.

Rep. Fishbein inquired how concept 1 appeared on the agenda and whether there was a screening request.

Rep. Fox explained that concepts were added to the agenda as a courtesy to the state agencies. Rep. Fox noted that agency proposals have not been screened in the past even if committee leadership did not agree with the proposals.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco requested a brief summary of concept 1 and all subsequent concepts raised before the committee during today's meeting.

Rep. Fox summarized concept 1 as a measure similar to Resolution Act 19-1 to allow for early voting. In 2019, Resolution Act 19-1 passed the House with a supermajority, but only a simple majority in the Senate.

Sen. Sampson identified the requirement for a constitutional amendment to allow for early voting. He finds it contradictory that the Governor and the Secretary of the State would enforce executive orders allowing for no-excuse absentee ballots and drop boxes, which he also considers to be early voting. Sen. Sampson urged the committee to rewrite the resolution to be more limited and defined in nature.

Sen. Haskell made clear that the committee was voting on concepts, not bill language.

Sen. Sampson responded by bringing attention to the title of the concept, citing the word “approving” as a means for utilizing the same language used in Resolution Act 19-1, which was passed in 2019.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any further comments. Seeing none, he moved to a vote on concept 1.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco requested a roll call vote on concept 1.

Rep. Fox called for a roll call vote on concept 1: Resolution Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting.

Total voting = 19. Those voting yea = 15, those voting nay = 4, absent = 0.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 2 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

2. Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for No-Excuse Absentee Voting

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 2.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Sen. Haskell.

Rep. Fox offered a brief summary of concept 2. Rep. Fox stated that the concept is a bill proposed by the Secretary of the State, which would eliminate the requirement for voters to have a specific reason for requesting an absentee ballot.

Rep. Fox opened discussion of concept 2 to members of the committee.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco emphasized the importance of the State Constitution, adding that there is no reason for a concept pertaining a constitutional amendment to lack basic language describing what is being proposed.

Sen. Sampson announced his support for the concept to allow for a public hearing on the issue. He added that unless the future resolution provides concrete language, he wouldn't support the bill going forward as he believes it jeopardizes the integrity of the electoral process.

Rep. Fishbein inquired as to whether the language of the bill will include provisions requiring voter identification.

Rep. Fox reiterated that this was strictly a concept, and therefore no language has been formulated.

Rep. Palm asked for clarification on the difference between raising a concept and early voting on a concept. She explained that her understanding of raising concepts does not include a discussion of language details.

Rep. Fox clarified that raised concepts help determine the committee agenda moving forward.

Legislative Commissioners' Office staff confirmed that raising a concept is a vote for the committee to draft language related to the initial concept, ultimately resulting in a public hearing.

Rep. Carpino sought clarification as to whether there is proposed language that already exists for this concept since this is a resolution rather than act.

Rep. Fox stated that the Secretary of the State has provided the committee with mere concepts rather than any language.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any further comments. Seeing none, he moved to a vote on concept 2.

Rep. Fox called for a roll call vote on concept 2: Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for No-Excuse Absentee Voting.

Total voting = 19. Those voting yea = 17, those voting nay = 2, absent = 0.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 3 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

### 3. An Act Concerning Voter Participation

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 3.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Haddad.

Rep. Fox summarized concept 3 as a proposal from the Secretary of the State based upon a 2019 bill that passed the House but was not taken up for a vote in the Senate. The act is designed to allow persons on parole to vote and to codify the automatic voter registration system at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco addressed concerns with the title stating that the contents of the concept do not accurately reflect the meaning of voter participation.

Rep. Fishbein noted apprehension of eliminating the requirement to mandate a parolee to pay court ordered restitution prior to being given voting rights.

Sen. Sampson concurred with Rep. Mastrofrancesco and Rep. Fishbein. He emphasized the importance of renaming the concept to reflect its contents.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any further comments. Seeing none, he moved to a vote on concept 3.

Rep. Fox called for a roll call vote on concept 3: An Act Concerning Voter Participation

Total voting = 19. Those voting yea = 16, those voting nay = 3, absent = 0.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 4 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

### 4. An Act Concerning Election Administration

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 4.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Sen. Haskell.

Rep. Fox summarized the concept as a proposal to make ballot drop boxes a permanent fixture; realignment of Connecticut ballots following two federal lawsuits in 2016; a request that the Department of Justice adjust the timeline for receiving absentee ballots from overseas voters during special elections; allow the Secretary of the State to develop an electronic signature process for online forms; add centralized counting of absentee ballots from a random selection of five percent of voting locations as a means to conduct post-election audits; allow the Secretary to review the 2020-2021 redistricting plan; adjust the election calendar to allow for towns holding May elections to switch the date to November; allow the Governor's office to send writs of election to a town through electronic means rather than hand delivery by a marshal.

Rep. Fox opened discussion of concept 4 to members of the committee. Seeing no requests for comments, he moved to a vote on concept 4.

Sen. Sampson suggested that concept 4 and the remaining items be added to a consent calendar for a roll vote at the end of the meeting.

Rep. Mastrofrancesco and Rep. Fox concurred with Sen. Sampson's proposal.

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to add concept 4 to the consent calendar.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Rosario.

The motion passed and concept 4 was added to the consent calendar.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 5 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

#### 5. An Act Concerning a Study of Risk Limiting Audits for Elections

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 5.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. McCarthy Vahey.

Rep. Fox summarized the concept as a way to create a bipartisan task force to evaluate the value of a risk limiting audits process. The concept includes a directive to the task force to conduct a pilot program during the 2021 elections and provide a report to the Government Administration and Elections Committee in January of 2022.

Rep. Fox opened discussion of concept 5 to members of the committee.

Sen. Sampson referred to the document from the Secretary of the State outlining this proposal and questioned the meaning of a risk limiting audit. Sen. Sampson added that he is currently in favor of the concept but requires more clarity moving forward.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any further comments. Seeing none, Rep. Fox asked for a motion to add concept 5 to the consent calendar.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Sen. Sampson.

The motion passed and concept 5 was added to the consent calendar.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 6 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

6. An Act Concerning Temporary Changes in Election Laws Due to COVID-19

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 6.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Thomas.

Rep. Fox summarized concept 6 as a way to allow voters to cast an absentee ballot using COVID-19 as an excuse throughout the year 2021.

Rep. Fox opened discussion of concept 6 to members of the committee.

Sen. Sampson questioned how concept 6 differs from the concept voted on during the meeting on January 13 and noted a recognition of striking similarities between the two concepts.

Rep. Fox reiterated of the courtesy given to agencies and their proposed concepts. He acknowledged that there might be a difference in the timelines for each concept.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any further comments. Seeing none, Rep. Fox asked for a motion to add concept 6 to the consent calendar.

Rep. McCarthy Vahey made the motion and it was seconded by Sen. Flexer.

The motion passed and concept 6 was added to the consent calendar.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 7 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

7. An Act Concerning Municipal Ethics

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 7.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Santiago.

Rep. Fox summarized the concept as a proposal from the Office of State Ethics and similar to a bill that passed committee in 2019 but failed to be called for a vote in the House and Senate chambers. The concept would require municipalities to document an ethics code; require the Office of State Ethics to publish a model code; mandate the Office of State Ethics to offer the Government Administration and Elections Committee a report on the municipal compliance by January 2024; authorize the Office of State Ethics to conduct municipal ethics education programs using appropriations.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any comments. Seeing none, Rep. Fox asked for a motion to add concept 7 to the consent calendar.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Sen. Sampson.

The motion passed and concept 7 was added to the consent calendar.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 8 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

8. An Act Concerning Revisions to the State Codes of Ethics

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 8.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Rosario.

Rep. Fox summarized the concept as a proposal that would make changes to the state code of ethics in accordance with agency rules.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any comments. Seeing none, Rep. Fox asked for a motion to add concept 8 to the consent calendar.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. McCarthy Vahey.

The motion passed and concept 8 was added to the consent calendar.

Rep. Fox moved to concept 9 listed in Section IV of the agenda:

9. An Act Concerning the Nondisclosure of Residential Addresses of  
Attorney  
General Employees

Rep. Fox asked for a motion to raise concept 9.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Thomas.

Rep. Fox summarized the concept as a means to expand freedom of information protection to addresses of employees of the Office of the Attorney General.

Rep. Fox asked members if they had any comments. Seeing none, Rep. Fox asked for a motion to add concept 9 to the consent calendar.

Sen. Flexer made the motion and it was seconded by Rep. Santiago.

The motion passed and concept 9 was added to the consent calendar.

Rep. Fox asked for a roll call vote on the consent calendar which includes concepts 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 in Section IV of the agenda.

Total voting = 18. Those voting yea = 17, those voting nay = 1, absent = 1.

A motion was duly made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.

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Administrator

Val Mehmeti  
Committee Clerk