



Office of the Secretary of the State

State of Connecticut
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Stephanie Thomas

Secretary of the State

Jacqueline A. Kozin

Deputy Secretary of the State

**Appropriations Committee
February 13, 2024**

**AMENDED WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
SECRETARY OF THE STATE STEPHANIE THOMAS**

Good afternoon Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum, and Paris, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our Office's concerns regarding our budget for the remainder of this biennium.

Despite the Office of the Secretary of the State (SOTS) generating revenue six times the size of its budget, over \$58 million in revenue directed into the General Fund in FY23 alone, the Office is continuously under budgeted for the significant responsibilities it is charged to execute.

Rising costs and implementing new programs that are underfunded do strain operations, but for the most part, SOTS staff has always found a way to fulfill obligations.

However, this biennium is possibly the first time that may not happen.

I am significantly concerned about the holdback of \$750,000 from our FY24 budget as well as the potential holdback of budgeted dollars from FY25. These holdbacks of budgetary dollars in either, or both, fiscal years would be catastrophic to the office, in particular the agency's ability to maintain services provided by the Legislative and Elections Administration Division (LEAD) and Business Services Division (BSD). The work performed by these divisions ensure businesses are legally registered to operate in our state, and elections are uniform and secure.

The lack of these funds in FY24 will jeopardize key operations including:

- Hosting of the Centralized Voter Registration System (CVRS)
- Fees for the vendor who maintains the CVRS and Election Management System
- Costs required to host the online absentee ballot request portal
- Translation services for election materials
- Implementation of the CT Voting Rights Act which has already been delayed
- Provision of uniform election forms to the towns; and
- Paying staff salaries for the June 2024 pay cycle;



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In addition to being concerned about being able to maintain operations in FY 25 should funds be held back again, our office would like the legislature to consider providing \$9.0 million in funding for the key components listed below to help keep elections safe and secure:

- \$500,000 - Increased costs to our office we can no longer absorb
 - The printing required for the November 2024 ballot question
 - Legal research tool
 - Software licenses
 - Blue Book printing
 - ERIC dues
 - Other miscellaneous increases
- \$1,000,000 - Risk limiting audits
- \$2,500,000 - Public education campaign
 - Early voting
 - Fraud prevention
 - General voter information such as registration, polling place lookup, etc.
- \$5,000,000 - Funds for towns to implement early voting

My office has been able to continuously function under the “do more with less” sentiment; however, this time, it will be impossible to meet legally required obligations because the provided necessary funding has been taken away.

Without budgeted funding, our office will be facing seriously difficult choices when trying to stand up a new style of voting in a precarious time for our democracy, while also ensuring our state continues to be a welcoming place for businesses.

Thank you.