

# Government Oversight Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5253 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING VOTING PROCEDURES FOR AND STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION OVERSIGHT OF FIRE

**Title:** DISTRICTS.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/24/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep Santanella, Rep Winter, Rep Heffernan

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill is based on recommendations from a legislative working group, establishes new rules for fire district governance by requiring that all officer elections and business conducted at annual or special meetings use paper ballots only, with voting limited to those physically present and no absentee ballots allowed. It creates an enforcement process allowing aggrieved voters to file complaints with SEEC and appeal decisions to Superior Court, which may award attorney's fees and other remedies, while also clarifying SEEC's authority in investigations, designating the fire district clerk for subpoenas and responsibility over voting equipment. The bill includes technical updates and directs SEEC to work with fire districts statewide to ensure compliance by July 1, 2027.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Changes to Sec 2 to incorporate the e-cert, PA 26-1

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Ryan M. Burns, Executive Director and General Counsel State Elections Enforcement Commission:** Director Burns opposes this bill. He feels this bill would dramatically expand the scope of SEEC's authority to fire district meetings where the business of such district is transacted. Not only would this be beyond the core competency of the agency, but such investigations would lack the support of the statutes and regulations that govern elections. SEEC does not administer elections; by design, we are a reactive agency. Requiring SEEC to "coordinate with each fire district in the state to promote implementation of and compliance with" the bill's balloting requirements would push the agency beyond its core competency and into the administration of elections we are tasked to investigate. We would essentially be administrator, moderator, parliamentarian, investigator and enforcer of rules for such meetings, not just the voting, but any conduct relating to a vote. Such a mandate creates inherent conflicts and would undermine the agency's proper functioning.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**John Santanella, State Representative-58th District Connecticut General Assembly:** Rep. Santanella supports this bill, he feels that at its core, HB 5253 is about protecting taxpayer interests in proceedings conducted under Title 7 of the Connecticut General Statutes. The intent of this legislation is not to invite excessive litigation or administrative oversight. Ideally, these protections would rarely need to be invoked. Rather, HB 5253 is intended as a provide safeguard for taxpayers to ensure their confidence that the voting process of fire districts is fair, transparent, and accountable.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

**James Trzaski, Fire Chief, The South Fire District- Middletown, Connecticut:** The South Fire District, the district opposes HB 5253, stating that it threatens several things; Local control: The bill could shift authority to the state, weaken community accountability, and change election procedures (including eliminating absentee ballots, which may limit public participation). Financial accountability: Added regulations may create unnecessary administrative burdens without improving services or transparency. Established governance: The district believes long-standing, effective local structures could be undermined. Overall, the South Fire District urges rejection of the bill to preserve local governance, operational independence, and effective community-based service.

**Reported by: Clerk- Greg Wolff  
Assistant Clerk- Mike Hamann**

**Date: 3/20/26**