



General Assembly

Substitute Bill No. 5253

February Session, 2026



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

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2027*) (a) The provisions of this
2 section shall apply to each fire district within the state, whether
3 operating under a special act or under sections 7-324 to 7-329, inclusive,
4 of the general statutes, and shall be in addition to the provisions of any
5 such special act or of said sections, as applicable. Where there is any
6 conflict between a provision of any such special act or of said sections
7 and this section, the provisions of this section shall apply.

8 (b) At each annual or special meeting of a fire district, for the election
9 of fire district officers or the transaction of such other business as may
10 properly come before such meeting, each item on the call of such
11 meeting shall be submitted to the persons qualified to vote in such
12 meeting for a vote by paper ballots. Only those such persons present at
13 such meeting shall be permitted to cast a vote, and no person shall be
14 permitted to cast a vote by absentee ballot.

15 (c) Any person qualified to vote in a meeting of a fire district
16 described in subsection (b) of this section who claims to be aggrieved by
17 a violation of the provisions of this section, or of section 7-327 of the

18 general statutes, as amended by this act, applicable to such fire district,
19 may file a written complaint under oath with the State Elections
20 Enforcement Commission alleging such violation. Upon receipt of such
21 complaint, the commission may exercise with respect to such fire district
22 the duties and powers set forth in section 9-7b of the general statutes, as
23 amended by this act, and render a decision on such complaint. Any
24 party aggrieved by the decision of the commission may appeal such
25 decision to the Superior Court in accordance with the provisions of
26 section 4-183 of the general statutes. In any such appeal to the Superior
27 Court or any subsequent judicial proceeding related to such violation,
28 the court may (1) award reasonable attorneys' fees, litigation costs and
29 punitive damages, in addition to any civil penalties levied by the
30 commission, (2) hold any fire district officer personally liable for such
31 fees, costs and penalties whenever the court finds such fire district
32 officer to have knowingly and wilfully engaged in such violation or any
33 other similar malfeasance related to voting procedures at such meeting,
34 and (3) grant such other relief as the court deems appropriate, including,
35 but not limited to, ordering that a new vote be taken for the election of
36 fire district officers or the transaction of such other business as may
37 properly come before such meeting.

38 Sec. 2. Subsection (a) of section 9-7b of the 2026 supplement to the
39 general statutes, as amended by section 97 of public act 26-1, is repealed
40 and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2027*):

41 (a) The State Elections Enforcement Commission shall have the
42 following duties and powers:

43 (1) (A) To make investigations on its own initiative or with respect to
44 statements filed with the commission by the Secretary of the State, any
45 town clerk or any registrar of voters or upon written complaint under
46 oath by any individual, with respect to alleged violations of any
47 provision of the general statutes relating to any election or referendum,
48 any primary held pursuant to section 9-423, 9-425 or 9-464 or any
49 primary held pursuant to a special act, [and to] or upon written
50 complaint under oath by any eligible voter of a fire district, with respect

51 to alleged violations of any provision of section 1 of this act or section 7-
52 327, as amended by this act, that is applicable to fire districts and
53 relating to a vote at a meeting of such fire district;

54 (B) To hold hearings when the commission deems necessary to
55 investigate violations of any provisions of the general statutes relating
56 to any such election, primary, [or] referendum or vote at a meeting of a
57 fire district, and for the purpose of such hearings the commission may
58 administer oaths, examine witnesses and receive oral and documentary
59 evidence, and shall have the power to subpoena witnesses under
60 procedural rules the commission shall adopt, to compel their attendance
61 and to require the production for examination of any books and papers
62 which the commission deems relevant to any matter under investigation
63 or in question. Until the commission determines that it is necessary to
64 investigate a violation, commission members and staff shall keep
65 confidential any information concerning a complaint or preliminary
66 investigation, except upon request of the treasurer, deputy treasurer,
67 chairperson or candidate affiliated with a committee that is the subject
68 of the complaint or preliminary investigation; [.]

69 (C) In connection with its investigation of any alleged violation of any
70 provision of chapter 145, [or] of any provision of section 9-359 or section
71 9-359a, or of any provision of section 7-327, as amended by this act, that
72 is applicable to fire districts or of any provision of section 1 of this act,
73 the commission shall also have the power to subpoena any municipal
74 clerk or clerk of a fire district and to require the production for
75 examination of any absentee ballot, inner and outer envelope from
76 which any such ballot has been removed, depository envelope
77 containing any such ballot or inner or outer envelope as provided in
78 sections 9-150a and 9-150b and any other record, form or document as
79 provided in section 9-150b, in connection with the election, primary, [or]
80 referendum or vote at a meeting of a fire district to which the
81 investigation relates. In case of a refusal to comply with any subpoena
82 issued pursuant to this subsection or to testify with respect to any matter
83 upon which that person may be lawfully interrogated, the superior
84 court for the judicial district of Hartford, on application of the

85 commission, may issue an order requiring such person to comply with
86 such subpoena and to testify; failure to obey any such order of the court
87 may be punished by the court as a contempt thereof. In any matter
88 under investigation which concerns the operation or inspection of or
89 outcome recorded on any voting tabulator, the commission may issue
90 an order to the registrars of voters or clerk of the fire district to impound
91 such tabulator until the investigation is completed;

92 (2) To levy a civil penalty not to exceed (A) two thousand dollars per
93 offense against any person the commission finds to be in violation of
94 any provision of chapter 145, part V of chapter 146, part I of chapter 147,
95 chapter 148, section 7-9, any provision of section 7-327, as amended by
96 this act, that is applicable to fire districts, any provision of section 9-12,
97 subsection (a) of section 9-17, section 9-19b, 9-19e, 9-19g to 9-19k,
98 inclusive, 9-20, 9-21, 9-23a, 9-23g, 9-23h, 9-23j to 9-23o, inclusive, 9-23r,
99 9-26, 9-31a, 9-32, 9-35, 9-35b, 9-35c, 9-40a, 9-42, 9-43, 9-50a, 9-50d, as
100 amended by [this act] public act 26-1, 9-56, 9-59, 9-163aa, as amended by
101 [this act] public act 26-1, 9-168d, 9-170, 9-171, 9-172, 9-232i to 9-232o,
102 inclusive, 9-404a to 9-404c, inclusive, 9-409, 9-410, 9-412, 9-436, 9-436a,
103 9-453e to 9-453h, inclusive, 9-453k or 9-453o, or section 1 of this act, (B)
104 two thousand dollars per offense against any town clerk, registrar of
105 voters, an appointee or designee of a town clerk or registrar of voters,
106 fire district officer or any other election or primary official whom the
107 commission finds to have failed to discharge a duty imposed by any
108 provision of chapter 146 or 147, or any provision of section 7-327, as
109 amended by this act, that is applicable to fire districts or any provision
110 of section 1 of this act, (C) two thousand dollars per offense against any
111 person the commission finds to have (i) improperly voted in any
112 election, primary, [or] referendum or meeting of a fire district, and (ii)
113 not been legally qualified to vote in such election, primary, [or]
114 referendum or meeting, or (D) two thousand dollars per offense or twice
115 the amount of any improper payment or contribution, whichever is
116 greater, against any person the commission finds to be in violation of
117 any provision of chapter 155 or 157. The commission may levy a civil
118 penalty against any person under subparagraph (A), (B), (C) or (D) of

119 this subdivision only after giving the person an opportunity to be heard
120 at a hearing conducted in accordance with sections 4-176e to 4-184,
121 inclusive. In the case of failure to pay any such penalty levied pursuant
122 to this subsection within thirty days of written notice sent by certified
123 or registered mail to such person, the superior court for the judicial
124 district of Hartford, on application of the commission, may issue an
125 order requiring such person to pay the penalty imposed and such court
126 costs, state marshal's fees and attorney's fees incurred by the
127 commission as the court may determine. Any civil penalties paid,
128 collected or recovered under subparagraph (D) of this subdivision for a
129 violation of any provision of chapter 155 applying to the office of the
130 Treasurer shall be deposited on a pro rata basis in any trust funds, as
131 defined in section 3-13c, affected by such violation; [.]

132 (3) (A) To issue an order requiring any person the commission finds
133 to have received any contribution or payment which is prohibited by
134 any of the provisions of chapter 155 or 157, after an opportunity to be
135 heard at a hearing conducted in accordance with the provisions of
136 sections 4-176e to 4-184, inclusive, to return such contribution or
137 payment to the donor or payor, or to remit such contribution or payment
138 to the state for deposit in the General Fund or the Citizens' Election
139 Fund, whichever is deemed necessary to effectuate the purposes of
140 chapter 155 or 157, as the case may be;

141 (B) To issue an order when the commission finds that an intentional
142 violation of any provision of chapter 155 or 157 has been committed,
143 after an opportunity to be heard at a hearing conducted in accordance
144 with sections 4-176e to 4-184, inclusive, which order may contain one or
145 more of the following sanctions: (i) Removal of a treasurer, deputy
146 treasurer or solicitor; (ii) prohibition on serving as a treasurer, deputy
147 treasurer or solicitor; and (iii) in the case of a party committee or a
148 political committee, suspension of all political activities, including, but
149 not limited to, the receipt of contributions and the making of
150 expenditures, provided the commission may not order such a
151 suspension unless the commission has previously ordered the removal
152 of the treasurer and notifies the officers of the committee that the

153 commission is considering such suspension;

154 (C) To issue an order revoking any person's eligibility to be appointed
155 or serve as an election, primary or referendum official or unofficial
156 checker or in any capacity at the polls on the day of an election, a
157 primary, [or] a referendum or a meeting of a fire district, when the
158 commission finds such person has intentionally violated any provision
159 of the general statutes relating to the conduct of an election, a primary,
160 [or] a referendum or in the case of a violation of section 1 of this act, a
161 meeting of a fire district, after an opportunity to be heard at a hearing
162 conducted in accordance with sections 4-176e to 4-184, inclusive;

163 (D) To issue an order to enforce the provisions of the Help America
164 Vote Act, P.L. 107-252, as amended from time to time, as the commission
165 deems appropriate;

166 (E) To issue an order following the commission's determination of the
167 right of an individual to be or remain an elector when such
168 determination is made (i) pursuant to an appeal taken to the commission
169 from a decision of the registrars of voters or board of admission of
170 electors under section 9-31l, or (ii) following the commission's
171 investigation pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection;

172 (F) To issue a cease and desist order for violation of any general
173 statute or regulation under the commission's jurisdiction and to take
174 reasonable actions necessary to compel compliance with such statute or
175 regulation;

176 (4) To issue an order to a candidate committee that receives moneys
177 from the Citizens' Election Fund pursuant to chapter 157, to comply
178 with the provisions of chapter 157, after an opportunity to be heard at a
179 hearing conducted in accordance with the provisions of sections 4-176e
180 to 4-184, inclusive;

181 (5) (A) To inspect or audit at any reasonable time and upon
182 reasonable notice the accounts or records of any treasurer or principal
183 treasurer, except as provided for in subparagraph (B) of this

184 subdivision, as required by chapter 155 or 157 and to audit any such
185 election, primary or referendum held within the state; provided, (i) (I)
186 not later than two months preceding the day of an election at which a
187 candidate is seeking election, the commission shall complete any audit
188 it has initiated in the absence of a complaint that involves a committee
189 of the same candidate from a previous election, and (II) during the two-
190 month period preceding the day of an election at which a candidate is
191 seeking election, the commission shall not initiate an audit in the
192 absence of a complaint that involves a committee of the same candidate
193 from a previous election, and (ii) the commission shall not audit any
194 caucus, as defined in subdivision (1) of section 9-372; [.]

195 (B) When conducting an audit after an election or primary, the
196 commission shall randomly audit not more than twenty per cent of
197 candidate committees, which shall be selected through the process of a
198 weighted lottery conducted by the commission that takes into account
199 the selection frequency of a district served by the office of state senator
200 or state representative, as applicable, for the immediately preceding
201 three regular elections for such office and increases or decreases the
202 likelihood that such district will be selected for audit based on such
203 selection frequency, except that the commissioner shall audit all
204 candidate committees for candidates for a state-wide office. Any such
205 lottery shall be duly noticed and open to the public; [.]

206 (C) The commission shall notify, in writing, any committee of a
207 candidate for an office in the general election, or of any candidate who
208 had a primary for nomination to any such office, of its selection for an
209 audit not later than May thirty-first of the year immediately following
210 such election. In no case shall the commission audit any such candidate
211 committee that the commission fails to provide notice to in accordance
212 with this subparagraph; [.]

213 (D) Not later than twelve months after the selection of candidate
214 committees through the lottery described in subparagraph (B) of this
215 subdivision, the commission shall complete the audit of each candidate
216 committee so selected and issue the commission's findings. Not later

217 than January 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, the commission shall
218 submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly
219 having cognizance of matters relating to government oversight, in
220 accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, concerning whether
221 there were any audits during the preceding calendar year that the
222 commission was unable to complete during such twelve-month period
223 and, if so, the reasons for such inability to complete such audits;

224 (6) To attempt to secure voluntary compliance, by informal methods
225 of conference, conciliation and persuasion, with any provision of
226 chapter 149, 151 to 153, inclusive, 155, 156 or 157, any provision of
227 section 7-327, as amended by this act, that is applicable to fire districts,
228 any provision of section 1 of this act or any other provision of the general
229 statutes relating to any such election, primary, [or] referendum or
230 meeting of a fire district;

231 (7) To consult with the Secretary of the State, the Chief State's
232 Attorney or the Attorney General on any matter which the commission
233 deems appropriate;

234 (8) To refer to the Chief State's Attorney evidence bearing upon
235 violation of any provision of chapter 149, 151 to 153, inclusive, 155, 156
236 or 157 or any other provision of the general statutes pertaining to or
237 relating to any such election, primary or referendum;

238 (9) To refer to the Attorney General evidence for injunctive relief and
239 any other ancillary equitable relief in the circumstances of subdivision
240 (8) of this subsection. Nothing in this subdivision shall preclude a
241 person who claims that he is aggrieved by a violation of any provision
242 of chapter 152 or any other provision of the general statutes relating to
243 referenda from pursuing injunctive and any other ancillary equitable
244 relief directly from the Superior Court by the filing of a complaint;

245 (10) To refer to the Attorney General evidence pertaining to any
246 ruling which the commission finds to be in error made by election
247 officials in connection with any election, primary or referendum. Those
248 remedies and procedures available to parties claiming to be aggrieved

249 under the provisions of sections 9-323, 9-324, 9-328 and 9-329a shall
250 apply to any complaint brought by the Attorney General as a result of
251 the provisions of this subdivision;

252 (11) To consult with the United States Department of Justice and the
253 United States Attorney for Connecticut on any investigation pertaining
254 to a violation of this section, section 9-12, subsection (a) of section 9-17
255 or section 9-19b, 9-19e, 9-19g, 9-19h, 9-19i, 9-20, 9-21, 9-23a, 9-23g, 9-23h,
256 9-23j to 9-23o, inclusive, 9-26, 9-31a, 9-32, 9-35, 9-35b, 9-35c, 9-40a, 9-42,
257 9-43, 9-50a, 9-56 or 9-59 and to refer to said department and attorney
258 evidence bearing upon any such violation for prosecution under the
259 provisions of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, P.L. 103-31, as
260 amended from time to time;

261 (12) To inspect reports filed with town clerks pursuant to chapter 155
262 and refer to the Chief State's Attorney evidence bearing upon any
263 violation of law therein if such violation was committed knowingly and
264 wilfully;

265 (13) To intervene in any action brought pursuant to the provisions of
266 sections 9-323, 9-324, 9-328 and 9-329a upon application to the court in
267 which such action is brought when in the opinion of the court it is
268 necessary to preserve evidence of possible criminal violation of the
269 election laws;

270 (14) To (A) adopt and publish regulations and issue declaratory
271 rulings pursuant to chapter 54 to carry out the provisions of section 9-
272 7a, this section, and chapters 155 and 157, (B) issue upon request and
273 publish advisory opinions in the Connecticut Law Journal upon the
274 requirements of chapters 155 and 157, (C) subject to the provisions of
275 subsection (c) of this section, issue and publish guidance documents
276 relating to the requirements of chapters 155 and 157, and (D) make
277 recommendations to the General Assembly concerning suggested
278 revisions of the election laws, except that the commission shall not issue
279 any declaratory ruling or advisory opinion relating to the provisions of
280 chapter 157 during the one-hundred-eighty-day period immediately

281 preceding a state election, provided nothing in this subdivision shall be
282 construed to limit the commission's ability during such period to
283 provide general guidance and clarification relating to the provisions of
284 chapter 157;

285 (15) To the extent that the [Elections Enforcement Commission]
286 commission is involved in the investigation of alleged or suspected
287 criminal violations of any provision of the general statutes pertaining to
288 or relating to any such election, primary, [or] referendum or in the case
289 of a violation of section 1 of this act, a meeting of a fire district, and is
290 engaged in such investigation for the purpose of presenting evidence to
291 the Chief State's Attorney, the [Elections Enforcement Commission]
292 commission shall be deemed a law enforcement agency for purposes of
293 subdivision (3) of subsection (b) of section 1-210, provided nothing in
294 this section shall be construed to exempt the [Elections Enforcement
295 Commission] commission in any other respect from the requirements of
296 the Freedom of Information Act, as defined in section 1-200;

297 (16) To enter into such contractual agreements as may be necessary
298 for the discharge of its duties, within the limits of its appropriated funds
299 and in accordance with established procedures;

300 (17) To provide the Secretary of the State with notice and copies of all
301 decisions rendered by the commission in contested cases, advisory
302 opinions and declaratory judgments, at the time such decisions,
303 judgments and opinions are made or issued;

304 (18) To receive and determine complaints filed under the Help
305 America Vote Act, P.L. 107-252, as amended from time to time, by any
306 person who believes there is a violation of any provision of Title III of
307 P.L. 107-252, as amended from time to time. Any complaint filed under
308 this subdivision shall be in writing, notarized and signed and sworn by
309 the person filing the complaint. At the request of the complainant, there
310 shall be a hearing on the record, conducted in accordance with sections
311 4-167e to 4-184, inclusive. The commission shall make a final
312 determination with respect to a complaint prior to the expiration of the

313 ninety-day period beginning on the date the complaint is filed, unless
314 the complainant consents to a longer period for making such
315 determination. If the commission fails to meet the applicable deadline
316 under this subdivision with respect to a complaint, the commission shall
317 resolve the complaint within sixty days after the expiration of such
318 ninety-day period under an alternative dispute resolution procedure
319 established by the commission.

320 Sec. 3. Section 7-327 of the general statutes is repealed and the
321 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2027*):

322 (a) At the meeting called for the purpose of establishing a district, as
323 provided in section 7-325, the voters shall, by ordinance, fix the date of
324 the annual meeting of the voters for the election of district officers and
325 transaction of such other business as may properly come before such
326 annual meeting. At the organization meeting of the district, the voters
327 shall elect from their number a president, vice president, five directors,
328 a clerk and a treasurer to serve until the first annual meeting for the
329 election of officers and thereafter such officers shall be elected annually.
330 Not fewer than fifteen voters of the district shall constitute a quorum for
331 the transaction of business at the organization meeting of the district;
332 and if fifteen voters are not present at such meeting, the selectmen may
333 adjourn such meeting from time to time, until at least fifteen voters are
334 present. Special meetings of the district may be called on the application
335 of ten per cent of the total number of persons qualified to vote in the
336 meeting of a district or twenty of the voters of such district, whichever
337 is less, or by the president or any three directors upon giving notice as
338 hereinafter provided. Any special meeting called on the application of
339 the voters shall be held within twenty-one days after receiving such
340 application. Notice of the holding of the annual meeting and all special
341 meetings shall be given by publication of a notice of such meetings in a
342 newspaper having a general circulation in such district at least ten days
343 before the day of such meetings, signed by the president or any three
344 directors, which notice shall designate the time and place of such
345 meetings and the business to be transacted [thereat] at such meetings.
346 Two hundred or more persons or ten per cent of the total number of

347 persons qualified to vote in the meeting of a district, whichever is less,
348 may petition the clerk of such district, in writing, at least twenty-four
349 hours prior to any such meeting, requesting that any item or items on
350 the call of such meeting be submitted to the persons qualified to vote in
351 such meeting not less than seven nor more than fourteen days thereafter,
352 on a day to be set by the district meeting or, if the district meeting does
353 not set a date, by the board of directors, for a vote by paper ballots or by
354 a "yes" or "no" vote on the voting [machines] tabulators, during the
355 hours between twelve o'clock noon and eight o'clock p.m., except that
356 any district may, by vote of its board of directors, provide for an earlier
357 hour for opening the polls but not earlier than six o'clock a.m. The paper
358 ballots or voting [machine ballot labels] tabulator ballots, as the case
359 may be, shall be provided by the clerk. When such a petition has been
360 filed with the clerk, the president, after completion of other business and
361 after reasonable discussion shall adjourn such meeting and order such
362 vote on such item or items in accordance with the petition; and any item
363 so voted may be rescinded in the same manner. The clerk shall phrase
364 such item or items in a form suitable for printing on such paper ballots
365 or [ballot labels] tabulator ballots. Not fewer than fifteen voters of the
366 district shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at any
367 meeting of the district; and if fifteen voters are not present at such
368 meeting, the president of the district or, in [his] the president's absence,
369 the vice president may adjourn such meeting from time to time, until at
370 least fifteen voters are present; and all meetings of the district where a
371 quorum is present may be adjourned from time to time by a vote of a
372 majority of the voters voting on the question of adjournment. At any
373 annual or special meeting, the voters may, by a majority vote of those
374 present, discontinue any purposes for which the district is established
375 or undertake any additional purpose or purposes enumerated in section
376 7-326.

377 (b) The president of the district shall be the chief executive officer
378 thereof and shall be a member of the board of directors. [He] The
379 president shall preside at all meetings of the voters of the district and at
380 all meetings of the directors, and at all meetings where [he] the president

381 presides, [he] the president shall vote to dissolve a tie when necessary.
382 [He] The president shall designate the duties devolving upon each of
383 the five directors, shall approve all bills for payment by the treasurer
384 and shall be, ex officio, a member of all committees and boards of the
385 district. The vice president shall be a member of the board of directors,
386 and shall have all the authority, power and duties of the president
387 whenever the president vacates his or her office, is absent or from any
388 cause is unable to perform his or her duties. The clerk shall be a member
389 of the board of directors, shall keep a record of the minutes of all
390 meetings of the voters and of the board of directors and shall keep at all
391 times a list of the voters of the district. The treasurer shall have charge
392 of the collection and payment of all moneys of the district, under such
393 rules and regulations as shall be prescribed by the board of directors,
394 and shall prepare the annual budget, which shall be reviewed by the
395 board of directors and transmitted with the board's comments and
396 recommendations to the annual budget meeting of the district for
397 adoption.

398 (c) The fiscal year of the district shall begin on July first and shall end
399 the following June thirtieth. Annually, not less than thirty days prior to
400 the beginning of the fiscal year, there shall be a meeting of the voters of
401 the district for the purpose of adopting the annual budget, laying the tax
402 and fixing the tax rate.

403 (d) Notwithstanding any provision of this chapter or any special act,
404 [to the contrary,] a district may, at its annual meeting or at a special
405 meeting called in accordance with the provisions of this section, (1)
406 increase the membership of the board of directors of the district to nine
407 members, three of whom may be elected each year to three-year terms,
408 and in such case, require the officers of the district to be chosen from
409 among the members of the board, or (2) provide for one member of the
410 board of directors of the district to serve as both clerk and treasurer of
411 the district.

412 Sec. 4. (*Effective from passage*) Not later than July 1, 2027, the State
413 Elections Enforcement Commission shall coordinate with each fire

414 district in the state to promote implementation of and compliance with
415 the provisions of section 7-327 of the general statutes, as amended by
416 this act that are applicable to fire districts and the provisions of section
417 1 of this act.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>July 1, 2027</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>July 1, 2027</i>	9-7b(a)
Sec. 3	<i>July 1, 2027</i>	7-327
Sec. 4	<i>from passage</i>	New section

GOS *Joint Favorable Subst.*