



# House of Representatives

General Assembly

**File No. 319**

February Session, 2026

Substitute House Bill No. 5253

*House of Representatives, April 1, 2026*

The Committee on Government Oversight reported through REP. DATHAN of the 142nd Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

***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.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

**OFA Fiscal Note**

**State Impact:**

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Elections Enforcement Commission	GF - Cost	None	91,000
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits <sup>1</sup>	GF - Cost	None	36,000
Resources of the General Fund	GF - Potential Revenue Gain	None	Minimal

Note: GF=General Fund

**Municipal Impact:** None

**Explanation**

The bill creates new requirements around elections and oversight for fire districts within the state and expands the authority of the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) to oversee those elections, resulting in a General Fund cost of \$127,000 in FY 28 and \$124,000 annually thereafter.

**Section 1** imposes a series of requirements on the conduct of elections within fire districts and empowers SEEC to investigate and issue civil penalties for violations of up to \$2,000 per offense, resulting in a potential minimal revenue gain to the General Fund beginning in FY 28. The exact revenue gain will depend on the number and value of additional penalties imposed by SEEC and the courts in response to the legislation.

<sup>1</sup>The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 41.82% of payroll in FY 27.

**Sections 2 and 3** expand SEEC's authority and oversight responsibilities for elections within fire districts, resulting in a cost of \$91,000 to SEEC in FY 28 and \$88,000 annually thereafter, with an associated annual fringe cost of \$36,000 beginning in FY 28. SEEC will need to hire one legal investigator at a salary of \$86,000 to support the expanded responsibilities and oversight created by the bill's provisions. Other expenses costs for the position total \$5,000 in FY 28 and \$2,000 annually thereafter, for a one-time equipment cost of approximately \$3,000 in FY 28 and an ongoing annual legal software cost of \$2,000 beginning in FY 28.

### ***The Out Years***

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future, subject to inflation and the number of additional fines imposed in response to the bill.

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**OLR Bill Analysis****sHB 5253*****AN ACT CONCERNING VOTING PROCEDURES FOR AND STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION OVERSIGHT OF FIRE DISTRICTS.*****SUMMARY**

This bill requires that all votes at a fire district meeting be conducted using paper ballots and only those present at a meeting may vote. The bill also explicitly prohibits using absentee ballots for these votes. The bill's provisions apply regardless of whether the fire district operates under special act or state law.

Correspondingly, the bill allows any person qualified to vote at a fire district meeting who alleges a violation of these provisions or the state law's special taxing district meeting requirements (if concerning a fire district) and is wronged as a result, to file a complaint with the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC).

The bill authorizes SEEC to investigate these complaints and make decisions on them. These decisions may be appealed to the court, as allowed under the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, which may (1) award reasonable attorney's fees, litigation costs, and punitive damages; (2) hold fire district officers personally liable for these costs if they knowingly and willfully violated these provisions or any other similar wrongdoing related to voting at fire district meetings; and (3) grant any other relief the court deems appropriate (for example, ordering a new vote).

Additionally, the bill requires SEEC, by July 1, 2027, to coordinate with fire districts to promote compliance with the bill.

The bill also updates outdated references to "voting machines" and "voting machine ballot labels" that may be used during special taxing

district meetings by replacing these references with “voting tabulator” and “voting tabulator ballots” (§ 3).

Finally, the bill makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2027, except that provision regarding SEEC’s coordination with fire districts is effective upon passage.

## **SEEC AUTHORITY OVER FIRE DISTRICTS**

### ***Investigative Authority***

Existing law authorizes SEEC to conduct investigations on its own initiative or in response to statements from the secretary of the state or any town clerk or registrar, as well as when any individual submits a written complaint under oath. Under current law, SEEC may generally investigate state law violations relating to an election, referendum, or primary as defined under the state’s election laws.

The bill expands this authority to include considering sworn written complaints from eligible voters of fire districts about violations of (1) the bill’s voting requirements and (2) state law’s requirements for voting during a special taxing district meeting.

Fire districts, like other special taxing districts, are wholly within a town and have the power to make appropriations or to levy taxes. Unlike voters under federal and state election law, special taxing district voters do not necessarily need to live in the applicable district, but instead may have the right to vote if they are a U.S. citizen and own qualifying property in the district (CGS § 7-6).

The bill explicitly expands SEEC’s authority to, among other things, (1) hold hearings on and investigate these matters; (2) subpoena any fire district clerk for its investigations; (3) administer oaths, examine witnesses, and receive evidence; (4) compel production of records, forms, and documents related to votes at fire district meetings; (5) order fire district clerks to impound voting tabulators for an investigation; and (6) voluntarily secure compliance, through informal methods, with the bill’s restrictions or fire district meetings.

Under current law, if someone violates the state's election administration laws, SEEC may revoke their eligibility to serve as an election, primary, or referendum official, and unofficial checker, and any other official capacity at a polling place on the day of an election, primary, referendum. The bill expands this authority to include prohibiting serving in these roles at fire district meetings.

Under the bill, SEEC may also do so if it finds a person intentionally violated the bill's voting requirements. Current law already generally authorizes SEEC to take these actions for elections, primaries, and referendums unrelated to fire districts.

Under existing law and the bill, SEEC is deemed a law enforcement agency if investigating to provide evidence to the chief state's attorney. As with similar criminal investigations SEEC conducts, the bill exempts certain investigatory records concerning fire district investigations from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Under FOIA, investigatory records of law enforcement agencies that are not available to the public may be exempt from FOIA if their release would not be in the public interest because it would, among other things, (1) identify informants or minor witnesses, (2) disclose signed or sworn witness statements, or (3) reveal investigatory techniques the public is not aware of.

### ***Fines***

Under existing law, SEEC may levy a civil penalty of up to \$2,000 against a person for violating certain election-related laws or against certain specified officials for failing to discharge a duty under the state's laws on elections and voting methods. The bill additionally allows for a fine against any person who (1) violates the state's law on fire district meetings or the bill's voting requirements or (2) improperly votes at a fire district meeting, including if they were not legally qualified to vote.

The bill also (1) adds fire district officers to the list of officials that may be fined for failing to discharge their duty and (2) expands SEEC's authority to levy fines against violators of the state's special taxing district meeting law or the bill's voting requirements, as well as any

official failing to discharge a duty under these laws. (It appears to authorize SEEC to issue a fine for violations of the state’s special taxing district meeting law unrelated to any voting.)

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Government Oversight Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 9 Nay 3 (03/17/2026)