



GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
Public Hearing

Testimony on July 21, 2020

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and Members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Sue W. Larsen and I am the President of the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC) and a Registrar of Voters in South Windsor. I am here to testify on the election bill, which many believe is only related to COVID-19.

I wish I could say the bill only relates to COVID-19—however this goes beyond the pandemic and makes substantial changes to our state's Election Day Registration (EDR) process. This bill allows residents who are in line at 8:00 p.m. to register to vote, and ROVAC feels this should not be implemented during a pandemic.

Currently towns are having a difficult time recruiting poll workers for the August Primary, which means it is very likely they will have the same issue in November. Registrars are also reevaluating their existing polling places and working to institute ever-changing social distancing protocols to keep the public and their staff safe while in-person voting take place. At the same time, many towns have been forced to find new locations for polling places because certain facilities are not allowing activities or public access due to COVID-19.

Connecticut's Registrars are up to the task of finding safe ways to administer the 2020 elections during this pandemic. ROVAC, in conjunction with the Town Clerks Association and the Secretary of the State, have worked tirelessly in making necessary adjustments to our state's elections and polling locations. However, at this time, ROVAC believes making changes to EDR will add a great deal of complexity and additional challenges to election administration.

If a Registrar decides to have an additional EDR location, the Secretary of the State's Office would need to be notified 90 days in advance. Therefore, if this bill were to pass, a town would need to have everything in place by August 3, 2020—one week before the primary. This would include all of the future individuals who would be working EDR on Election Day. Most large cities will not begin to finalize their list of poll workers until September—and as I stated earlier, finding people to work an election during a pandemic has become a daunting task.

This pandemic has taught us that planning for future social gatherings is also difficult. The state of Connecticut has had to push back its Phase III due to the rise COVID-19 infection rates in other states. Currently, only groups of 25 can gather and we do not know when or if that number will actually be increased—the reality is, it could very well be decreased. Towns would have to lock in an additional facility by August 3rd, but a facility that meets social distancing measures at the start of August may not meet future social distancing measures in November 2020.

This purposed legislation also pushes results reporting back 96 hours. There is no way of knowing if this timeframe will be feasible when EDR past 8:00 p.m. is added to the equation. Many towns will see an exponential increase in absentee voters and a possible decrease of residents voting in-person. The processing of absentee and EDR ballots is much more time consuming than those processed at the polls. There is an entire process that must be followed in order to count these ballots.

Teams of two poll workers, each from opposing parties, must carefully inspect the envelopes, separate the inner and outer envelopes and then separate the ballot from the outer envelope. The ballot must then be shuffled together with others in order to prevent the workers from accidentally seeing how someone has voted. The final step requires the teams to inspect the ballots and then a worker can finally insert the ballots through a tabulator. This is a much more labor intensive way of processing ballots.

In 2016 many cities saw between 2,000 and 6,000 absentee ballots cast in the last Presidential Election. In 2020 ROVAC expects that number to triple due to the large number of electors choosing to vote by mail for the August Primary.

On June 23rd the state of New York, which also allowed electors to vote through the mail by using absentee ballots, found that in some areas they were not able to expodite all of the ballots in the timeframe this bill proposes. Some races, such as the Democratic Primary for the 16th Congressional District, did not see final results until three weeks after the election took place. ROVAC would hope that Connecticut never sees anything close to this length in reporting. However, due to the fact that we are changing the way in which we administer elections during an ongoing pandemic, no one can really determine what will happen.

Therefore, ROVAC respectfully requests that EDR past 8:00 p.m. not move forward at this time. COVID-19 has forced Registrars to completely think outside of the box and revamp the way in which we administer elections. Allowing electors to vote absentee due to the COVID-19 pandemic is something that ROVAC supports, however making massive changes to the EDR at this time is not a prudent step and we ask that it be stripped from the language of this bill.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. ROVAC is committed to strengthening elections here in Connecticut. We are always more than willing to work with you and help you to edit language, should the Committee wish to do so.

Sue W. Larsen
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