



**GAE Committee  
Public Hearing  
March 24, 2021**

**TESTIMONY OF SECRETARY OF THE STATE DENISE W. MERRILL REGARDING:**

- **S.J. No. 13, RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLDS TO PREREGISTER TO VOTE, REGIONAL VOTING CENTERS AND EARLY VOTING**
- **H.B. No. 5540, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE**
- **H.B. No. 6211, AN ACT CONCERNING GENDER AND RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CERTAIN STATE APPOINTIVE BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES AND COUNCILS AND AN ONLINE SYSTEM FOR CONSIDERATION OF APPOINTMENTS WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT**
- **H.B. No. 6325, AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE, ABSENTEE BALLOTS AND ELECTION AUDITS**

Good morning Chairmen Fox and Flexer, Vice Chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and members of the committee. My name is Denise Merrill and I am the Secretary of the State of Connecticut. I would like to address several bills before the committee.

- **S.J. No. 13, RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLDS TO PREREGISTER TO VOTE, REGIONAL VOTING CENTERS AND EARLY VOTING**

S.J. 13 contains a provision similar to a proposal that I made in 2019 that would make our election systems more accessible to every eligible voter in Connecticut. Multiple and varied studies show that the earlier a voter first participates in the electoral process, the more likely they are to be a life-long voter. By engaging young potential voters in the civic life of their communities early, they are more likely to continue to engage for life.

This provision would amend the constitution to allow sixteen-year olds to preregister to vote, so that they will be able to vote when they are eighteen without registering again. This proposal is designed to work with the automatic voter registration that is already taking place at the DMV by registering eligible voters when many people first interact with the DMV – their sixteenth birthday. This change will make it more likely that young potential voters will register and vote.

I support this provision, with the following change. The language in the question is needlessly lawyerly and inaccessible to the average voter, and I propose changing it to make it shorter and easier to read without altering the substance of the amendment by reading, “Shall the Constitution of the State be amended to allow for sixteen year old citizens to preregister to vote, effective on their eighteenth birthday?”

I support this provision.

This resolution also contains language that is duplicative of H.J.R. No. 59, the resolution for an amendment to the Connecticut Constitution that would allow for Early Voting. As H.J.R. 59 has already passed through the Connecticut General Assembly once and only needs to pass again with a simple majority in order to appear on the ballot in the 2022 general election, H.J.R. 59 is a better vehicle for this language.

- **H.B. No. 6211, AN ACT CONCERNING GENDER AND RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CERTAIN STATE APPOINTIVE BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES AND COUNCILS AND AN ONLINE SYSTEM FOR CONSIDERATION OF APPOINTMENTS WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT**

Our government works best when it reflects all of us. Diversity in our government, including on our boards and commissions, improves the quality of our services, encourages better policy decisions, and promotes the public’s trust in our government. My office is responsible for receiving diversity reports from state boards and commissions, I am committed to helping to increase the diversity of those boards and commissions in any way I can.

Although clear progress has been made over the last ten years, according to the most recent report prepared by my office, on the reporting boards and commissions, men still make up 57% of the membership, despite making up only 49% of the population, and women are underrepresented making up 43% of the membership of boards and commissions despite being 51% of the Connecticut population. Similarly, the only racial group that is overrepresented on the membership of Connecticut's boards and commissions is white, non-Hispanic members who make up 78% of the membership and only 67% of the population. Every other racial group is underrepresented based on their proportion in Connecticut's population with the most glaring discrepancy being Hispanic members of all races – 17% of the population and only 4% of the makeup of Connecticut's boards and commissions. 11% of Connecticut's boards and commissions are made up of members of a single race and gender. The full report can be found here: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SOTS/Education/DiversityReport/2020-Report-on-Gender-and-Racial-Diversity-on-Connecticut-State-Boards-and-Commissions.pdf>

Connecticut still has a long way to go until the makeup of our boards and commissions resembles the rich diversity of our people. This bill would support that mission.

Section 1(b)(1) requires data reporting every two years, but Section 1(b)(2) requires that my office produce a report every five years. It may make more sense for the report to be produced every four years to align with the reporting requirements.

Section 1(b)(1) also requires the member of the board or commission to submit data to my office. Although I agree that it is important for the member to report their information themselves, the Office of the Governor and the legislature each maintain their own databases and it would be duplicative for my office to maintain a third. For efficiency's sake, I suggest the appointing authorities continue to track the data and simply share it with my office.

I support this bill.

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These bills would remove the authority of the Secretary of the State as the chief election officer of the state of Connecticut and transfer that authority to the legislature.

I oppose these bills.

Thank you.

