

# Government Administration and Elections Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-441

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION OVERSIGHT.

**Vote Date:** 3/26/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/18/2024

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration & Elections Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill establishes a Municipal Election Accountability board to oversee and review local election administration and establish procedural safeguards for these elections. It creates procedures for referring election irregularities to the accountability board and applies a tier of oversight to a municipality based on the need for oversight.

The substitute language removes the additional constitutional officers that were created by the original language of the bill.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Stephanie Thomas, Connecticut Secretary of The State: Has concerns that the placement of a volunteer board tasked with election oversight in the office of the Secretary would not be feasible as the office does not have the necessary funding to staff such a board. States that lines 10-15 should include the Voting Rights Act to ensure that nothing in this bill supersedes it. States that the volunteer board should have monthly hearings instead of meeting 5 days after a vote. Also states that there should be a process to pre-screen public complaints so that they can determine next steps regarding a complaint. Also states that there should be a process for determining a termination of oversight and that they support the timeline that the board is allowed to adopt regulations within.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Susyun Purefoy, Resident of Bridgeport: Supports this bill as a step in the right direction but believes that there is more that needs to be done to prevent the abuse of absentee balloting

by political operatives. States that there is no reason why political operatives should be able to walk into town hall and come out with stacks of ballot applications. Also states that the absentee voting process should strictly be between voters and election officials, and that while campaigns can educate voters on how to vote absentee, they should not be able to fill out the application for them.

Peter Spain: Conditionally supports this bill if two things are added. States that absentee ballot applications should not be available until 30 days before an election and that no one should be able to sign out more than 5 ballot applications for an election. Also states that without these changes, no meaningful change will take place to reduce absentee ballot fraud in Bridgeport and across the state.

Ms. Donna M. Curran: Supports this bill with some important changes. States that there should not be 90 days to apply for an absentee ballot, as this will result in a large number of ballots in existence that can be taken advantage of. States that there needs to be minimum one year jail time for those abusing absentee voting, and that there needs to be an extension of the statutes of limitation so that cases do not expire, and courts have enough time to hear them. Also states that more needs to be done to communicate with those who are affected by fraud and that people anywhere in state can get involved in the legislative process on this issue.

Marc Garofalo, Legislative Committee Member, CT Town Clerks Association: Supports this bill and expresses that the CTCA would like to be involved with the Municipal Elections Accountability Board as town clerks play a vital role in ensuring that elections are run effectively and cleanly so that the integrity of the process and the confidence of the public is maintained.

Sue Larsen, Legislative Chair, ROVAC: States that they support the concept of the bill and understand the need for a volunteer board to investigate any allegations of impropriety in an election. States that the Registrars of Voters on the board should have at least five years of experience and that Town Clerks are not always elected, so they should not be selected for the board based on party. Also states that there needs to be more clarification on the tiers of irregularity so that registrars can better understand the levels of oversight needed for increasing levels of violations.

Tom Swan, Executive Director, CCAG: Supports this bill with some concerns. States that there should be changes to ensure that the board can take timely action, and suggest that, to reduce the size of the board, that the representatives from the offices of the Treasurer and Comptroller should be removed to achieve this.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST: Agrees that the integrity of local elections need to be secured, but that a newly created volunteer board would be the wrong way to go about doing this. States that this bill could have unintended consequences as a result of placing more restrictions on small towns while trying to punish the actions taken during a mayoral race in a large city. Also states that the legislature should look at finding ways to punish and deter individuals who are trying to commit fraud, rather than increasing the burden on municipalities.

Randy Collins, Associate Director of Policy, The CCM: States that while the support the efforts to ensure election integrity, this bill could subject towns to new oversight based on a vague definition of a complaint and does not specify how long the municipality can be under such oversight. Also has concerns about whether the complete oversight would affect the contracts of municipal elections employees and if the board would be able to appropriate funds or hire additional employees. Also states that individual cases of alleged improprieties can be handle on a case-by-case basis.

Dr. Linda Dalessio: Opposes this bill as there should be an independent board that is overseen by the legislature comprised of citizens and legislators. States that there needs to be independent oversight of the Secretary of State's office and our elections because the office has not yet found a policy solution to fixing election fraud. Also states that the voter rolls need to be cleaned of inactive voters so that bad actors cannot take advantage of these votes to commit fraud and that several safeguards need to be implemented such as Voter ID and transparent ballot counting.

Karen LaFond, Reform Bridgeport Elections, Americans for Trump: Opposes this bill until it addresses election fraud in Bridgeport.

Several individuals expressed opposition to this bill, these individuals include:

Nicholas D'Amato  
Gary Corigliano  
Sandra DeBlois  
Several anonymous individuals

**Reported by: Gabriel Marques, Assistant Clerk      Date: 4/2/2024**