



Senate

General Assembly

File No. 639

January Session, 2025

Substitute Senate Bill No. 1515

Senate, April 10, 2025

The Committee on Government Administration and Elections reported through SEN. FLEXER of the 29th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION OVERSIGHT.

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

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) There is established a
2 Municipal Election Accountability Board, which shall be within the
3 office of the Secretary of the State for administrative purposes only, for
4 the purposes of (1) reviewing the administration of elections, primaries
5 and referenda, including the conduct of early voting, absentee voting
6 and same-day election registration, and the duties of election officials
7 under title 9 of the general statutes, in municipalities in this state
8 whenever such municipalities are referred to the board for such review,
9 (2) overseeing the administration of elections in such municipalities
10 where necessary, and (3) establishing procedural safeguards for the
11 effective conduct of such elections, primaries and referenda in such
12 municipalities. Nothing in this section shall be construed to (A) affect
13 the powers and duties of the Secretary of the State or the State Elections
14 Enforcement Commission under title 9 of the general statutes, including

15 chapter 151a of the general statutes, (B) preclude any person from
16 seeking additional remedies under title 9 of the general statutes,
17 including under chapter 151a of the general statutes, or (C) otherwise
18 affect chapter 151a of the general statutes.

19 (b) (1) The Municipal Election Accountability Board shall be
20 comprised of: (A) The Secretary of the State, or the Secretary's designee,
21 who shall be the chairperson of the board; (B) the executive director of
22 the State Elections Enforcement Commission, or the executive director's
23 designee; (C) nine members appointed by the Secretary of the State, with
24 the advice and consent of the General Assembly, as follows: (i) One
25 member who shall be admitted to the practice of law in this state and
26 has expertise in election law; (ii) two members who shall be moderators
27 certified under section 9-229 of the general statutes and enrolled in
28 different political parties and who shall be selected from lists of five
29 recommendations from each major party, as defined in section 9-372 of
30 the general statutes, provided by an association representing the
31 interests of registrars of voters in the state; (iii) two members who shall
32 be registrars of voters and enrolled in different political parties and who
33 shall be selected from lists of five recommendations from each major
34 party provided by an association representing the interests of registrars
35 of voters in the state; (iv) two members who shall be town clerks and
36 enrolled in different political parties and who shall be selected from lists
37 of five recommendations from each major party provided by an
38 association representing the interests of town clerks in the state; and (v)
39 two members who shall be chief elected officials of municipalities and
40 enrolled in different political parties and who shall be selected from lists
41 of five recommendations from each major party provided by, jointly, a
42 state-wide organization of municipal leaders and an organization that
43 advocates for the interests of small towns in the state; and (D) one
44 member appointed by each of the four legislative leaders, as defined in
45 section 4-9d of the general statutes, who shall have expertise in election
46 administration or election law, provided appointments under
47 subparagraphs (C) and (D) of this subdivision shall be made so that no
48 single municipality is represented by more than one member.

49 (2) Members described in subparagraphs (C) and (D) of subdivision
50 (1) of this subsection shall serve for a term of four years and until a
51 successor is appointed, and initial appointments of such members shall
52 be made not later than August 1, 2025. Members described in said
53 subparagraphs shall recuse themselves from participating in any
54 proceeding of the board on any matter in which a conflict exists due to
55 such member or the immediate family of such member being involved
56 in any matter before said board, including, but not limited to, a matter
57 concerning a town appearing before said board that a member
58 represents on said board. Any vacancy shall be filled by the appointing
59 authority for the remainder of the applicable member's unexpired term.
60 The members of the board shall serve without compensation, but shall
61 be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.
62 For the purposes of this subdivision, "immediate family" means a
63 dependent relative who resides in the member's household or any
64 spouse, child, parent or sibling of the member.

65 (c) (1) Beginning on the second Tuesday of January in 2026, and every
66 month thereafter on such second Tuesday, the Municipal Election
67 Accountability Board shall hold a regularly scheduled meeting.

68 (2) All regularly scheduled meetings shall be noticed on the Internet
69 web site of the office of the Secretary of the State. In the event of any
70 review hearing or preliminary review to be held under section 2 of this
71 act, information regarding such hearing or review shall be added to
72 such notice not later than forty-eight hours prior to any such meeting.

73 (3) A vacancy on the board shall not impair the right of the remaining
74 members to exercise all powers of the board, except that a majority of
75 the total membership of the board shall constitute a quorum.

76 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective January 1, 2026*) (a) (1) Whenever the Secretary
77 of the State or the State Elections Enforcement Commission is of the
78 opinion that a reasonable likelihood of irregularity or impropriety in the
79 administration of any election, primary or referendum in a municipality
80 exists, based on any formal or informal complaint received by the
81 Secretary or the commission from an individual, the Secretary or the

82 commission, as applicable, may refer such municipality to the
83 Municipal Election Accountability Board for a review hearing on such
84 municipality's procedures related to the conduct of any such election,
85 primary or referendum. Any such referral shall be accompanied by
86 supporting evidence, including, but not limited to, affidavits, written or
87 electronic correspondence and documented findings from an
88 investigation.

89 (2) Whenever a judge of the Superior Court is of the opinion that a
90 reasonable likelihood of irregularity or impropriety in the
91 administration of any election, primary or referendum in a municipality
92 exists, based on a matter before such court involving such municipality's
93 alleged violation of any provision of title 9 of the general statutes, such
94 judge may refer such municipality to the Municipal Election
95 Accountability Board for a review hearing on such municipality's
96 procedures related to the conduct of any such election, primary or
97 referendum. Any such referral shall be accompanied by supporting
98 evidence, including, but not limited to, any record developed during a
99 judicial proceeding.

100 (3) (A) Whenever a municipal clerk, registrar of voters or moderator
101 observes any act or omission that may present an impediment to the
102 timely and orderly administration of any duty required of a
103 municipality under title 9 of the general statutes, or (B) whenever the
104 chief executive officer of a municipality, based on a review of such
105 municipality's practices, identifies any such practice that may present
106 such an impediment, such municipal clerk, registrar of voters,
107 moderator or chief executive officer, as applicable, may refer such
108 municipality to the Municipal Election Accountability Board for a
109 review hearing on such municipality's procedures related to the conduct
110 of elections, primaries and referenda. Any such referral shall be
111 accompanied by supporting evidence, including, but not limited to,
112 affidavits, written or electronic correspondence, procedure manuals and
113 other guidance documents and logs of absentee ballot applications,
114 moderator's diaries or other contemporaneously-produced notes or
115 records.

116 (4) Whenever any citizen of the state has a good-faith belief that a
117 reasonable likelihood of irregularity or impropriety in the
118 administration of any election, primary or referendum in a municipality
119 exists, such citizen may file a report detailing such irregularity or
120 impropriety with the Municipal Election Accountability Board and
121 seeking a preliminary review of such municipality's procedures related
122 to the conduct of any such election, primary or referendum. Any such
123 report shall be accompanied by supporting evidence, including, but not
124 limited to, affidavits, written or electronic correspondence and
125 documented findings from an investigation. All submissions of such
126 supporting evidence shall be made under penalty of false statement.

127 (b) At the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Municipal Election
128 Accountability Board after the receipt of a citizen report under
129 subdivision (4) of subsection (a) of this section, the board shall hold a
130 preliminary review for the purpose of determining whether to hold a
131 review hearing under subsection (c) of this section. At such preliminary
132 review, the board shall vote to determine whether, if everything in the
133 citizen report is accurate, the reported municipality would be likely to
134 be designated for oversight in accordance with subsection (c) of this
135 section. In making such determination, the board shall consider (1) the
136 plausibility of the citizen report based on such report and supporting
137 evidence, (2) the nature and severity of the alleged irregularity or
138 impropriety, including whether any such irregularity or impropriety
139 would constitute a violation of the provisions of chapter 151 or 151a of
140 the general statutes, and (3) the frequency with which any such
141 irregularity or impropriety is alleged to have occurred in such reported
142 municipality. A preliminary review of a citizen report held under this
143 subsection shall not be considered a contested case under chapter 54 of
144 the general statutes.

145 (c) Immediately upon receipt of a referral under subdivisions (1) to
146 (3), inclusive, of subsection (a) of this section or an affirmative vote at a
147 preliminary review of a citizen report held under subsection (b) of this
148 section, the Municipal Election Accountability Board shall give notice of
149 such referral or citizen report to the referred municipality. Not later than

150 ten days after receipt of such notice, the referred municipality may
151 submit to the board a written response to such referral or citizen report.
152 Not later than forty-five days after receipt of such response or, if such
153 municipality does not submit such a written response, not later than
154 sixty days after the board gave notice of such referral or citizen report
155 to the referred municipality, the board shall hold a review hearing
156 during a regularly scheduled meeting of the board for the purpose of
157 presenting to such referred or reported municipality the evidence that
158 accompanied such referral or citizen report. The board may compel the
159 attendance of any person as a witness by subpoena issued by the board
160 and may compel the production for examination of any books and
161 papers that the board deems relevant to the matter in question. At such
162 review hearing, the chief executive officer, the corporation counsel or
163 any other duly authorized representative of such referred or reported
164 municipality shall have a right to respond to the evidence that
165 accompanied such referral or citizen report, including, but not limited
166 to, rebuttal of any fact alleged and confrontation of any witness. Not
167 later than the next regularly scheduled meeting after the review hearing,
168 the board shall vote to determine (1) whether to designate such referred
169 or reported municipality for oversight by the board in accordance with
170 the provisions of section 3 of this act, (2) if such oversight is deemed
171 necessary, the tier to which such municipality shall be designated, and
172 (3) if such oversight is deemed necessary, the length of time such
173 municipality shall be subject to such oversight. In making the
174 determination under subdivisions (1) to (3), inclusive, of this subsection,
175 the board shall consider: (A) The referred or reported municipality's
176 response, if any, to the evidence that accompanied such referral or
177 citizen report, (B) the nature and severity of the alleged irregularity or
178 impropriety, including whether any such irregularity or impropriety
179 constitutes a violation of the provisions of chapter 151 or 151a of the
180 general statutes, and (C) the frequency with which any such irregularity
181 or impropriety appears to have occurred in such referred or reported
182 municipality. The determination of the board under this subsection may
183 be appealed in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54 of the
184 general statutes. Any such appeal shall be privileged with respect to

185 assignment.

186 Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective January 1, 2026*) A referred municipality
187 designated by the Municipal Election Accountability Board as a:

188 (1) Tier I municipality shall be subject to oversight by the board
189 consisting of (A) development by such municipality of a plan to mitigate
190 the concerns that warranted such designation by the board, which shall
191 be submitted to the board for approval and modification as required by
192 the board, (B) mandatory training of election officials in election
193 administration procedures and best practices, conducted by the office of
194 the Secretary of the State or by a certified moderator, town clerk or
195 registrar of voters, or a combination thereof, selected by the Secretary of
196 the State, and (C) distribution by said office to such election officials of
197 instruction or training manuals or other resources for promoting best
198 practices in election administration.

199 (2) Tier II municipality shall be subject to oversight by the board
200 consisting of (A) the measures provided under subdivision (1) of this
201 section for a Tier I municipality, and (B) regular contact with the
202 municipality to ensure (i) compliance with the developed mitigation
203 plan and timely achievement of the benchmarks set forth in such
204 mitigation plan, (ii) attendance of election officials at all mandatory
205 training, and (iii) distribution of manuals or resources in accordance
206 with the provisions of subparagraph (C) of subdivision (1) of this
207 section.

208 (3) Tier III municipality shall be subject to oversight by the board
209 consisting of (A) the measures provided under subdivision (2) of this
210 section for a Tier II municipality, and (B) appointment of an election
211 monitor (i) who shall be authorized to (I) conduct inspections, inquiries
212 and investigations related to any duty or responsibility under title 9 of
213 the general statutes to be carried out by any official of such municipality
214 or appointee of such official, (II) have access to all records, data and
215 material maintained by or available to any such official or appointee,
216 and (III) immediately report to the Secretary of the State any irregularity
217 or impropriety in the performance of any duty or responsibility

218 described in subparagraph (B)(i)(I) of this subdivision, and (ii) who shall
 219 be provided, by such municipality, with any office space, supplies,
 220 equipment and services necessary to properly carry out such election
 221 monitor's duties and responsibilities.

222 (4) Tier IV municipality shall be subject to oversight by the board
 223 consisting of the complete administration by the board of any election,
 224 primary or referendum in such municipality, and all procedures related
 225 to the orderly conduct of any such election, primary or referendum,
 226 notwithstanding the provisions of (A) titles 7 and 9 of the general
 227 statutes, (B) any special act, and (C) any charter or home rule ordinance
 228 adopted pursuant to chapter 99 of the general statutes.

229 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) Not later than January 1, 2026,
 230 the Municipal Election Accountability Board shall adopt regulations, in
 231 accordance with the provisions of chapter 54 of the general statutes, as
 232 the board deems necessary to implement the provisions of sections 1 to
 233 3, inclusive, of this act.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>January 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 3	<i>January 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 4	<i>from passage</i>	New section

GAE *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 26 \$	FY 27 \$
Secretary of the State	GF - Cost	385,000	385,000
Secretary of the State	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	152,697	152,697

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 26 \$	FY 27 \$
Various Municipalities	Potential Cost	See Below	See Below

Explanation

The bill establishes the Municipal Election Accountability Board (MEAB) within the office of the Secretary of the State (SOTS) and empowers the board to review misconduct when a case is referred to them and provide oversight when violations have occurred, resulting in the fiscal impacts described below.

The bill results in a cost of \$385,000 in FY 26 and FY 27 for salary and other expenses to SOTS and \$152,697 in fringe to support four staff members to facilitate the board as outlined in the bill². The additional

¹The 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 40.71% of payroll in FY 26.

² This includes an Executive Director, a Staff Attorney II, Elections Officer, and an Administrative Assistant.

staff will help to facilitate the board and provide analysis and recommendations for municipalities under board oversight. There is an additional cost due to the requirement for reimbursement of expenses to board members for reasonable expenses related to the performance of the job.

There is a potential cost associated with the oversight of the board. MEAB is empowered to place municipalities under certain circumstances in one of four-tiers of oversight. The exact cost would depend on the number of municipalities subject to board oversight, the level of oversight imposed, and resources required.

Additionally, there is a potential cost to municipalities to the extent that misconduct is found and what oversight is designated by MEAB. The exact cost would depend on the level of oversight imposed.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation, wage increases, and oversight decisions of MEAB.

OLR Bill Analysis**sSB 1515*****AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION OVERSIGHT.*****SUMMARY**

This bill establishes a 15-person Municipal Election Accountability Board to receive referrals of election administration violations from certain state entities, courts, election and municipal officials, and state citizens (e.g., early voting, absentee voting, and same-day election registration violations, as well as election official duties). Further, the bill authorizes the board to (1) conduct review hearings to determine if violations occurred and (2) if violations took place, order varying oversight levels for election administration and establish procedural safeguards, up to a full intervention.

The bill specifies that the board is within the Secretary of the State's office for administrative purposes only and that it is not to be construed to affect (1) the State Election Enforcement Commission's (SEEC) or the secretary's existing election oversight authority, (2) the state's Voting Rights Act (VRA, Chapter 151a), and (3) anyone from seeking alternative remedies allowed by state election law, including under the state VRA.

By January 1, 2026, the board is required to adopt any regulations it deems necessary to implement the bill's provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2026, except that provisions establishing the board and requiring it to adopt regulations are effective upon passage.

BOARD OPERATIONS***Board Membership***

Under the bill, the board consists of 15 members. It includes the secretary of the state and SEEC’s executive director, or their respective designees, and 13 appointed members as shown in the table below. The secretary of the state serves as the board’s chairperson.

Table: Appointed Members

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Qualification</i>
House speaker, senate president pro tempore, and house and senate minority leaders	1 each	Election administration or election law experience
Secretary of the State	Nine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One admitted to practice law in the state with election law expertise • Two certified moderators from different political parties and chosen from a list of recommendations from an organization representing registrars of voter interests • Two registrars of voters from different political parties and chosen from a list of recommendations from an organization representing registrars of voter interests • Two town clerks from different political parties and chosen from a list of recommendations from an organization representing town clerk interests • Two municipal chief elected officials of different political parties and from a list of joint recommendations from an organization that advocates for small town interests and a statewide organization of municipal leaders

Any lists provided by an organization must include five members of each major party for the secretary to consider. Members appointed by the secretary of the state are subject to legislative approval. Among all appointed members, a municipality may only be represented once on the board. The appointments are for four-year terms and until successors are appointed. Initial appointments must be made by August 1, 2025. Any vacancy must be filled by the appointing authority for the original member’s remaining term.

Board Logistics

The bill requires the board to begin meeting in January 2026 and have a regularly scheduled monthly meeting on the second Tuesday. These meetings must be noticed on the secretary of the state's website, and any review hearing or preliminary review (see below) must be added to this notice at least 48 hours before the scheduled meeting. A majority of the total membership constitutes a quorum.

Under the bill, appointed members must recuse themselves from participating in a board proceeding if they, a town they represent, or an immediate family member is involved in the matter before the board. Immediate family includes a spouse, child, parent, and sibling, as well as any dependent relative living in the member's home.

The bill specifies that members are not compensated for serving on the board, but can be reimbursed for expenses incurred in performing their duties. Further, a vacancy on the board does not impair the right of the remaining members to exercise the board's powers.

REFERRAL TO THE BOARD***Secretary of the State or SEEC***

The bill allows the secretary of the state or SEEC to refer a municipality to the board if either believes, based on any formal or informal complaints they have received, that there is a reasonable likelihood that irregularity or impropriety occurred in municipal election administration (i.e. for an election, primary, or referendum). They must provide any supporting evidence with the referral, including any affidavits, written or electronic correspondence, and documented findings from an investigation.

Superior Court

A Superior Court judge may also refer a municipality to the board based on a matter before the court about an alleged election violation by the municipality based on there being a reasonable likelihood of irregularity or impropriety. The judge must provide any supporting evidence with the referral, including any record developed during a

judicial proceeding.

Municipal Officers and Election Officials

A town clerk, registrar of voters, or moderator may refer a municipality to the board if they observe an act or omission in a municipality that may impede the timely and orderly administration of required election administration duties. Similarly, a municipality's chief executive officer (CEO) may do this after a review of the municipality's practices. The municipal official must provide any supporting evidence, including affidavits, written or electronic correspondence, procedure manuals and other guidance documents, absentee ballot application logs, moderator's diaries, and other contemporaneously produced notes or records.

State Citizens

A state citizen may file a report with the board for a preliminary review if he or she has a good-faith belief that there is a reasonable likelihood of an irregularity or impropriety in municipal election administration. The citizen must provide supporting evidence, including affidavits, written or electronic correspondence, and documented findings from an investigation. All submissions of evidence must be made under the penalty of false statement. By law, false statement is a class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to 364 days in prison, a fine of up to \$2,000, or both (CGS § 53a-157b).

BOARD REVIEW

Preliminary Review

After receiving a report from a state citizen, the board must conduct a preliminary review at the next regularly scheduled board meeting and vote on whether to conduct a review hearing (see below).

In making the determination, the board must consider if the reported municipality would be likely be designated for oversight under the bill's provisions if everything in the citizen report is considered accurate based on (1) the report's plausibility, based on the supporting evidence; (2) the nature and severity of the alleged irregularity or impropriety,

including whether it would constitute an election crime or violate the state VRA; and (3) how often these irregularities or improprieties appear to occur.

The bill specifies that a preliminary review is not considered a contested case under the Uniform Administrative Procedure Act (UAPA).

Review Hearing

Under the bill, when a municipality is referred by one of the above state or municipal entities, or if the board voted to conduct a review hearing for a citizen report, the board must notify the municipality. The municipality must be given the opportunity to submit a written response to the referral or report within 10 days of receiving the notice. (The bill does not require the board to give the municipality any information or evidence on the matter.)

Within (1) 45 days of receiving the municipality's response or (2) 60 days after the board gave the municipality notice and no response was received, the board must conduct a review hearing during a regularly scheduled meeting. At the hearing, the board must present any evidence that accompanied the referral or report. The bill authorizes the board to subpoena to compel (1) any witness to testify and (2) the production or examination of any books or papers the board deems relevant to the matter.

The municipality has the right to respond to this evidence, including rebutting any fact alleged or confronting witnesses. The municipality may be represented by the municipal CEO, corporation counsel, or any other authorized representative.

By the next regularly scheduled meeting, the board must vote on whether to designate a municipality for oversight. In making its decision, the board must consider (1) the municipality's response to the evidence; (2) the nature and severity of the alleged irregularities or improprieties, including if an election crime or a violation of the state's voting rights act occurred; and (3) how often these irregularities or

improprieties appear to occur.

If oversight is approved, the board must determine the tier of oversight to be applied (see below) and specify the duration of the oversight. The board's determination may be appealed under the UAPA and is privileged for assignment.

OVERSIGHT TIERS

The bill establishes four tiers of oversight that the board may implement. Low-numbered tiers generally warrant less oversight while high-numbered tiers warrant more.

Tiers I & II

Tier I oversight consists of the following:

1. developing and submitting a plan to mitigate the board's concerns, subject to any modifications and approval of the board;
2. mandatory training for election officials in election administration procedures and best practices conducted by (a) the secretary of the state; (b) certified moderators, town clerks, or registrars selected by the secretary; or (c) a combination of them; and
3. distribution of instruction or training manuals or other resources to promote election administration best practices.

Tier II oversight consists of all measures for Tier I, plus regular board contact with the municipality to ensure compliance of the requirements set above.

Tier III

Under Tier III oversight, a municipality may be subject to any interventions authorized under lower oversight tiers. The municipality is also subject to a board-appointed election monitor who is authorized to conduct inspections, inquiries, and investigations related to election administration duties and responsibilities performed by municipal officials and their appointees. The bill requires a monitor to immediately

report any irregularity or impropriety discovered in these efforts to the secretary. To carry out these duties, the bill requires that the monitor have access to any records, data, and material maintained or available to the officials or appointees.

Further, the municipality must give the monitor any office space, supplies, equipment, and services necessary to perform these responsibilities.

Tier IV

Tier IV oversight consists of complete board administration of any election, primary, or referendum in the municipality and related procedures, regardless of any other provision of the state’s municipal or election laws, any special act, or any charter or home rule ordinance.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 17 Nay 2 (03/26/2025)