

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1535

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE'S

Title: RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO EARLY VOTING.

Vote Date: 3/26/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/24/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The November 2024 election marked the first time that Connecticut implemented a system for early voting. There has been a growing demand for increase efficiency, accessibility, and protections for voting and elections. This bill proposes several recommendations from the Secretary of the State's office to the early voting process to address these demands. These bill aims to address several concerns that voters have with early voting, as it has become a much more popular avenue for voting and allows for as much voter participation as possible. With these new proposals, the bill aims to make early voting more safe and secure while instilling faith in voters that the administration of early voting is fair, effective, and accessible.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

This substitute language removes the provision about the color-coded early voting ballots as there were concerns about the logistics with municipalities that encompasses multiple districts. It requires a municipality's legislative body to designate early voting locations instead of the town registrar. This could allow a municipality to democratically choose which would be the best location. The language also requires that any additional voting locations for a municipality with a qualifying higher education institution introduce that location on the campus instead of in the municipality. This would allow the opportunity for greater involvement for qualified voters living on said campus as they do not always have an accessible way to vote off campus. The language also that moderators include their cellphone number, if available, to the Secretary of the State in their reports. This would allow increased transparency for moderators in the election process. The language makes several minor technical changes to provide further clarity.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State, Office of the Secretary of the State

Secretary Thomas supports the bill. She supports various provisions in the bill. She supports the registrars of voters in each town designating early voting locations, believing the bill provides clear instruction to resolve impasses. She supports the new certification process for early voting location and SDR plans, believing it is a more efficient process. While she supports the concept of early voting locations for municipality with a college, she believes it should be amended to requires that the additional location be on the campus. She supports requiring the registrar to provide contact information for Early Voting and SDR moderators, as it will allow for her office to respond to issues in a timelier manner. She supports the change in producers to use tabulators for early voting, as it streamlines the process while also ensuring voters' perception of privacy of their ballots. She also supports the extension of prohibitions for official on primary or election days to early voting and SDR officials, saying it ensures the election process. While the office was initially supportive of using color-coded district indicators for ballots, she expresses concerns of larger districts that would make implementation virtually impossible. Lastly, she supports the provision to prevent individuals with criminal offenses to be in election positions, as it will uphold the integrity of election administrations and instill trust in them.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Susan Bouregy

Ms. Bouregy supports the bill, noting that it will help improve the voting process and ensure efficiency and security, all while empowering people to vote. The enhancements to authentication and storage of ballots supports her view.

Ben McGorty, State Representative, Connecticut General Assembly

State Representative Ben McGorty provided comments on the bill, noting that this legislation should be used as a vehicle to prohibit early voting on Easter Sunday for the upcoming special election in the 113th Assembly district. He testified that legislation passed in 2024 made an exception to not allow voting on East Sunday in 2024. He argues that holding an early voting on the holiday will not only burden, but is insensitive to observers who consists of voters, polling workers, town hall staff, and the candidates.

Jason Perillo, State Senator, Connecticut General Assembly

Senator Perillo provided comments on the bill, asking for the committee to swiftly add a section to the bill that will prohibit voting on Easter Sunday in the upcoming special election in the 113th House District. He claims that the significance of the holiday for those of the Christian faith will prevent them from going to vote, and holding a voting day on this day will cause a burden for observers that are Registrars, Town Clerks, municipal staff, candidates, and voters. He references legislation passed in 2024 that would allow the Governor to declare a future holiday where early voting would not be allowed and encourages the Secretary of the State to address the issues swiftly.

Ann Reed, Vice President for Advocacy, League of Women Voters of Connecticut

Ms. Reed supports the bill, listing several provisions which she says will help many municipal registrars and poll workers, including the elimination of envelopes for early voting. These technical changes help municipalities administer early voting operations and aid in their future success, noting its helpfulness in 2024. She cites the prohibition of registrars from appointing moderators with criminal backgrounds as an example of those needed reforms.

Amy Romano, State Representative Candidate, 113th Assembly District

Ms. Romano supports an amendment to the bill that would change the current law to include Easter 2025 and all future holidays as banned days for early voting. She expresses frustration she shares with fellow Christian voters in her district that don't want to choose between their civic and spiritual duties. She wants the General Assembly to prevent disenfranchisement on all levels.

Elizabeth Rousseau, Registrar of Voters, Town of West Hartford

Ms. Rousseau provides comments on the bill, believing that early voting must be better supported by the state. She emphasizes the struggles that municipalities face when the Secretary of the State's funding is cut, and they are unable to provide much needed assistance to those municipalities. This is more difficult as new policies such as tabulators for early voting are being proposed. She requests that the committee consider early voting days to be "right sized" for primaries and municipal elections. She proposes several changes to the length of early voting for primaries and early voting, specifically reducing the number of early voting days from 7-10 as opposed to 14. She reasons that this is unnecessary for less engaged and smaller municipalities. She believes the provision related to the deadline for unaffiliated voters to change parties to vote in the primary will be confusing for Registrars and early voting primary workers. She believes that requiring towns with a university or college to open a location near them presents issues for logistics, staffing, and the timeframe for setting these locations up, along with the costs, to not adequately meet up with the Secretary of State's expectations. She also states concerns with removing the envelope process for early voting, noting the importance of the printed labels to catch mistakes and its assurance that voters will receive the correct ballot. She does support the use of the envelope process for same day election registration ballots, but asks for clarification on the moderator, believing that a central counting moderator would be the most appropriate. She questions the intent of appointing a separate moderator for Same Day Registration, as moderators for Early Voting also handle these responsibilities. While she supports the need for voters to get the correct ballot via color indicators to identify the right district, she cites concerns that disparate communities such as New Haven and New Hartford may not benefit from this, as they have numerous districts. She believes that the towns should be given flexibility based on their resources. Lastly, she supports the prevention of appointment of moderators with criminal histories but feels the Secretary of the State should check each prospective moderator to ensure that they can't be disqualified, citing the fact that they have more time and resources.

Christopher Silhavey, Member, Connecticut Republican State Central Committee

Mr. Silhavey provided comments on the bill and believes it should allow for the revision of Early Voting Days for the special election in the vacant 113th Assembly District to accommodate observers of Easter Sunday, which happens to be when one of the early voting days. He cites Section 9-163 which prohibited the Easter Sunday as being an early voting day for elections, and that it should've been written to include future Easter Sundays instead of that particular day. He does note, however, that the Governor can designate prohibited voting days for religious observances, noting that heads of state at the federal level on both sides have designated Easter Sunday as a banned voting day for religious observances purposes. He emphasizes the heavily religious population in the town of Shelton and believes allowing a voting day on this day will disenfranchise many voters and will discourage voter turnout and maximum participation in this election, while disrespecting those voters. He believes the bill should be amended to change the reference to March 31, 2024, to Easter Sunday or adjust the early voting schedule for this special election from April 20, 2025, to the preceding Tuesday.

Patty Spruance, President, Connecticut Town Clerks Association

Ms. Spruance supports the bill, specifically the provision to allow tabulators for early voting, which she says will make the process more efficient and secure. Voters' ballots will be stored well and remain intact, as well eliminate the need to store envelopes. She notes the association has concerns with section 6 of the bill because larger municipalities with multiple districts may not have enough distinguishable colors or eligible ballot printers to use. Instead, she argues that there should be a "ballot on demand" system for these municipalities.

Claire Walsh, DWA Indivisible

Ms. Walsh writes in support of the bill, noting that these measures will help increase voter participation and greater access to the vote. She believes the proposal will streamline processes for same day registration, the processing and storage of ballot, and expanding voters access, while prohibiting political solicitation near polling locations.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut

Ms. Zaccagnino supports the bill, highlighting the importance of the right to vote and the agency's dedication to supporting initiatives that expand the right to vote for all individuals. She lists several provisions in the bill which she says makes important improvements to the early voting system. However, she expresses concern with one section of the bill which prevents registrars from appointing people as moderators if they have been convicted of a crime or felony. She feels that all people should have an equal opportunity to contribute to society regardless of whether they have committed a crime. She cites the unintended collateral consequences that many convicted individuals face that impacts their ability to get and do their job and encourages the committee to use an individualized approach like the one in Public Act 22-28.

Several individuals submitted similar testimony requesting the committee, through this legislation, to address the special election for the 113th Assembly district in Shelton. They

want to exclude 4/20/2025 as an Early Voting Day, move the beginning of the early voting period to 4/15/2025, and have it run through the rest of the week. They cite conflicts with the Easter Holiday and a fear of lower turnout and inconvenience for those observing, from voters to poll workers, municipal staff, and candidates. While some people may be able to vote another day, those with limitations will be unable to This testimony was provided by:

- **Rosemary Acevedo**
- **Wayne Bragg**
- **Alicia Carrano**
- **Maggie Cassano**
- **Jean Cayer**
- **Frank Cordova**
- **Janet Cordova**
- **Ella Cristiano**
- **Larissa Cristiano**
- **Matthew Cristiano**
- **Robert Cristiano**
- **Jennifer Cutrali**
- **Danielle Donofrio**
- **William Eannotti**
- **Sally Finck**
- **Brett Greenlaw**
- **Christina Greenlaw**
- **Cristina Greenlaw**
- **Dylan Greenlaw**
- **Virginia Harger**
- **Andrew Lewis**
- **Joan Littlefield**
- **Patricia Moonan, Assistant Registrar of Voters, City of Shelton**
- **Lauren Moore**
- **James Oraziatti**
- **John Ovesny**
- **Ruth Ovesny**
- **Bette Lynn Paez**
- **Carol Ann Pavone**
- **Peter Pavone, Registrar of Voters, City of Shelton**
- **Donald Ramia**
- **Mark Romano**
- **Tyler Romano**
- **Lorraine Rossner**
- **Janet Sabovik, Registrar of Voters, City of Shelton**
- **Jayne Sabovik, Moderator for Election, City of Shelton**
- **John Sabovik**
- **Ronald Sabovik**
- **Dennis Salzer**
- **Tina Schiappa**
- **Anthony Simonetti**
- **Diane Stilwell**

- Lori Vano
- Thomas Way
- Margaret Weber
- Theresa Welch
- Janet Wheeler
- Kim Wokanovicz
- 1 Anonymous individual

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Beverly Allen

Ms. Allen opposes the bill, believing that all voting should take place on the day of the election.

Aaron Bowman

Mr. Bowman opposes the bill, believing it will shift the control of elections away from the local municipalities and put it in the hands of the state. He expresses concerns with requiring college towns to have early voting location near the campus, believing that the students who live there are not rooted in the community enough to be able to vote in their college. He cited the University of Connecticut at Mansfield as an example, which he notes added cost and complexity to the process. The allowance of same-day registration and expanded powers to the Secretary of state, he notes, will only centralize power, and undermine election security. He wants elections to remain local.

Linda Dalessio

Ms. Dalessio opposes the bill, firm in her belief that voter rolls are not accurate in the state by exceeded the number of real voters in the state. She notes the error rate per federal law for Connecticut to be 12 errors, and claim the voters rolls through an audit in the state showed 240,000 errors.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns

Ms. Gara provided comments on the bill, noting that the bill is an unfunded mandate for small cities and towns to implement early in-person voting and that the small towns of CT incurred substantial costs with implementing early voting. She states that the towns have faced reduction of funding from \$1.8 million to \$1 million in 2024, which failed to cover the rising costs of equipment and other materials. She expresses frustration with the Governor's proposed budget that would eliminate funding for municipalities and does not know if legislators will restore that funding in the budget. She emphasizes the hard work that polling workers do and that struggles associated with staffing, not to mention the rising costs having an impact in terms of raising property taxes or cuts to other municipal programs, imposing a burden on taxpayers.

Sue Larsen, Chairman, Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut Legislative Committee

Ms. Larsen provided comments on the bill. She says the association supports the use of tabulators and allowing voters to enter their ballots directly without the use of an envelopment, believing it will ensure efficiency in voting, and asks the committee to include an affidavit signed by the voter certifying that they voted early. She believes this will ensure a streamlined and effective process for checking off voters properly. She cites internal polling from the agency which found that voters want short time frames for early voting in elections and primaries, which she infers will provide financial relief to municipalities. She feels that allowing the legislative bodies of municipalities to break a disagreement between the Registrars of Voters when determining early voting locations allows politics take over the decision-making process and will only prioritize their needs. She acknowledges the high costs associated with a provision in the bill that would require color coding ballots and that most new tabulators only handle white ballots. She believes the opening of college locations provision needs to be adjusted, noting the town of Mansfield operating a location at its UConn campus, requires additional assistance from the state. She also writes that Same Day Registration under the primary rules be removed or revised to allow same day registration for primaries, as it currently forces individuals to wait another day after registering to vote. Lastly, she notes that requiring moderators for same day registration adds costs for Registrars, noting that moderators are not necessary at these locations as they are the same as polling locations.

Reported by: Patrick Riley

Date: 4/2/2025