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SECRETARY OF THE STATE
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**Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz
Government Administration & Elections Committee
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Good Afternoon Chairman Caruso, Chairwoman Slossberg and members of the GAE Committee. For the record, my name is Susan Bysiewicz and I am the Secretary of the State. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding several bills on your public hearing agenda.

S.B. No. 444: AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN REVISIONS AND TECHNICAL CHANGES TO THE ELECTION LAWS

This bill, which I proposed, would:

- establish a “zone of privacy” for voters in the polling place, mandates that poll workers provide voters with “privacy sleeves” and establishes a series of other privacy measures;
- eliminate the requirement that recounts of optical scan ballots be conducted by hand;
- require absentee ballots to be automatically mailed to people with disabilities (as requested by Representative Sandy Nafis);
- require town clerks to notify the Secretary of the State’s Office if they are holding a municipal primary;
- prohibit a company from transporting voting machines while a candidate or a family member is affiliated with the company;
- delete the provision that allows towns to have 2 or 4 registrars of voters (as requested by the Town of North Branford with the support of Senator Ed Meyer and Representative Vincent Candelora);
- clarify the number of candidates that a voter can vote for on the ballot

- change Absentee Ballot counting procedures to comply with new machines, specifically identify when Absentee Ballots are counted on Election Day;
- require registrars of voters to notify the Secretary of the State’s Office of their election results, number of recounts, vacancies and any changes to their polling places in a municipal election year;
- clarify the write-in process to reflect the use of new voting machines;
- clarify ballot placement of candidates for cross-endorsement to reflect the use of new voting machines;
- clarify that the Secretary of the State’s Office is responsible for funding our UCONN partnership;
- amend the Bill of Rights to allow voters a choice of voting equipment;
- require that all certificates of endorsement for state office be filed with the Secretary of the State’s Office;
- move the date of filing for the certification of endorsement used with nominating petitions to be consistent with other petition filings;
- remove the exemption for towns that hold a recount from conducting an audit;
- clarify that the registrar of voters must provide a sufficient number of voting booths to be used with the new voting machines;
- allow the Secretary of the State’s staff to access each polling place;
- amend the qualifications of a poll worker for a primary to be consistent with the qualifications that were already changed in PA 07-194 for election poll workers;
- amend statutes to allow a registrar of voters to designate a person to be in her office on Election Day instead of requiring the registrar to be in her office on Election Day;
- clarify how to remove a candidate’s name from the new paper ballots if the candidate withdraws; and
- move the timeline of the audit to occur right after the election.

H.J. No. 21: RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD PERSONS WHO WILL BE EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE AT THE NEXT REGULAR ELECTION TO VOTE IN PRIMARIES RELATED TO SUCH ELECTION

During my tenure as Secretary of the State, I have made it a priority to promote civic awareness and encourage greater participation of Connecticut’s young people in the democratic process. This proposal would

amend the State Constitution to allow 17 year-olds who will be 18 at the next regular election to vote in primaries for such regular elections. Although Connecticut fares better than other states when it comes to youth participation in the political process, this change to our State Constitution would promote greater participation among our youth.

I commend Representative Jaime Spallone who has taken a leadership role in fighting for passage of this legislation. Unfortunately, during the 2007 legislative session, the vote fell short of the required super majority by only a few votes. Therefore, we re-introduced this resolution for the upcoming 2008 legislative session.

This amendment will make Connecticut a national leader in youth voting rights. It has been more than 35 years since we lowered the voting age to 18 and we strongly believe that the time has come to do this again. Lowering the voting age for primaries will increase voter turnout among young people and their parents, supplement our existing civics curriculum and fix the inequity that allows 17 year-olds to enlist in the armed services but denies them the right to vote.

In Iowa, 17-year olds can vote in a primary if they will be 18 by the time of the general election. As news reports showed, there was an historic youth turnout in the Iowa caucus, a showing that affected the outcome of that critical contest.

As background, there are two ways to amend the Connecticut Constitution. One option is for three quarters of the House and Senate to approve the amendment which will then go onto the ballot in the next general election that falls on an even numbered year. The other option is for a simple majority in both the House and Senate to approve the measure in two successive General Assemblies, with an intervening election. If that happened, it would then go onto the ballot in the next general election that falls on an even numbered year.

If a super-majority of the House and Senate were to approve this resolution during the 2008 legislative session, then the question to amend the State Constitution would be placed on the 2008 ballot.

Despite what many assume to be the law, the United States Constitution does not deny 17 year-olds the right to vote. The 26th Amendment to the United States Constitution only states that the right of citizens who are

eighteen years of age or older to vote shall not be denied by the United States or by any State on account of age. Taking into account that the Constitution does not bar states from lowering the voting age, some states have done exactly that. In the past several years, nine other states in the nation have passed measures that allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries so long as they turn 18 by the general election. The states include: Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia.

This Committee has been very supportive of this measure in the past and I strongly urge its passage.

H.B. No. 5663: AN ACT CONCERNING UNITED STATES SENATE VACANCIES

This bill would make the filling of a vacancy for U.S. Senate consistent with Representative in Congress. Currently, the Governor has the power to appoint someone to fill a vacancy for U.S. Senate. This runs counter to our democratic process where the power to elect a public official should be placed in the hands of our citizens. I support removing the Governor's authority to appoint someone to fill a U.S. Senate vacancy, however, I respectfully request that this Committee extend the Election Calendar closer to 150 days which is the current standard in statute. This would allow time for party endorsements and a potential primary, would ensure the efficient administration of a primary and general election by my office and local registrars, and would give voters an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the candidates. As always, I would be happy to work with this Committee to draft this legislation.

H.B. No. 5660: AN ACT PROHIBITING "ROBO" CALLS

I am very supportive of this proposal. In response to several constituents who have contacted me, I proposed legislation that would ban political candidates and their campaigns from generating so-called "robo-calls" in the state. Other states have passed legislation similar to H.B. #5660 that would give voters the option to accept or decline a "robo-call" through a statement by the voice of the candidate.

H.B. No. 5662: AN ACT CONCERNING AN AGREEMENT AMONG THE STATES TO ELECT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES BY NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

I am supportive of the concept of electing the President by popular vote rather than through the Electoral College. However, my preference would be to eliminate the Electoral College at the federal level. As the Chief Election Official for this state, I am concerned that this bill, as drafted, may put us in a position where our state could support a candidate that is not supported by the compact.

S.B. No. 445: AN ACT CONCERNING PERMANENT ABSENTEE BALLOT STATUS

This provision, supported by Representative Sandy Nafis, is also found in Section #21 of S.B. # 444 and I support it.

H.B. No. 5029: AN ACT CONCERNING THE ETHICS CODE FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

I have been on record before this Committee and earlier this week in support of various ethics reform proposals. In particular, I strongly support the provision that would revoke the pension of a public official that is convicted of a crime.

H.B. No. 5659: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECURITY OF CHILDREN AT POLLING LOCATIONS

I applaud the idea of keeping our children safe and understand the goals of this proposal. While my Office believes that Registrars of Voters already have the ability to request that a police officer be at the polls, I support the requirement found in this bill that would require all Boards of Education to have a security plan in place on Election Day so that child safety is a priority.

H.B. No. 5665: AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO THE CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS AND CERTAIN COMPENSATION OF REGISTRARS OF VOTERS

My office has a partnership with the state's registrars of voters and I appreciate all of the work that they do to make our elections a success. This ongoing partnership seeks to work with the registrars to help educate and train those who volunteer each year to serve as poll workers every time an election is held. However, I have some reservations about this proposed bill brought forward by the Registrars of Voters Association in its current form.

I am happy to work with them on improving the language to make it more voter-friendly. In particular, my concerns relates to public openness and transparency of voter registration lists and the maintenance of such lists. I am supportive, however, of ensuring that the registrars of voters receive sufficient compensation to attend trainings and conferences.

Finally, I respectfully request that this Committee consider moving all May elections to November in order to streamline election administration and training. We have been contacted regarding this issue and I support this proposal. When I took office as Secretary of the State, there were 15 towns which held May Elections. Since then, all but 6 towns hold May Elections (Andover, Naugatuck, Union, Bethany, Woodbridge). After a charter vote this November, it is expected that Bolton will move their elections from May to November. In addition, 9 boroughs hold May Elections. Clearly, the trend has been that these towns and boroughs have been moving their Election Day to November. I recommend a 2011 effective date so that towns will have an opportunity to change their local charter if necessary. I would be happy to provide this Committee with language that meets this goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I am available to answer any questions that you may have.