

**CONNECTICUT STATE JOINT COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS**

Testimony on HB #6251
AN ACT AUTHORIZING ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections, I am Maine Representative Anne Haskell. I represent a portion of the city of Portland, Maine and I am here today in support of HB 6251 to promote voter participation by permitting individuals to register and vote on the day of a regular election. For several years prior to my election I served as a Deputy Registrar of Voters at various polling places in Portland so my experience is both as an elected official and as one who has actually registered voters on Election Day.

The most fundamental right and responsibility of citizenship in America is voting for our representatives to government. That right was fought for by brave Americans and remains at the very top of my list of citizen's responsibilities.

I believe that barriers to **registering to vote** amount to barriers to the **exercise of the right to vote**. There are also those who could even be denied voting rights on Election Day including people who have recently moved, or whose voter registration may have been incomplete or lost.

Let me tell you about Election Day Registration Maine; its history, how it is administered and its impact.

- How did we come to enact EDR?

In 1973 the existing six month residency requirement was reduced to 30 days by the Maine legislature. In its review of that proposed change the Maine Supreme Judicial Court in an Opinion of the Justices determined that residency requirement violated the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. It went on to say that the State's only interest is the administrative task of registration and a registration requirement was permitted only to the extent that it is tied to and doesn't exceed a reasonable period for completion of registration. After that opinion that basically said the State's only interest was administrative, the legislature enacted Election Day Registration and it has been in place since then.

- What are the administrative safeguards to avoid fraud?

In the last nine days before an election and on Election Day (called the 'closed period') those wishing to register must produce proof of residency and proof of identity. If they cannot provide either or both, they will vote a 'challenged' ballot, which is counted but kept separately so that if the election is close enough to have relied on that vote, the proof can be obtained. Registrars can and should investigate qualifications of any challenged voters after the election and remove voters if they are not qualified. The voter then has the right to exercise due process by appealing the registrar's decision a process before the next election. The election officials who used the challenge process did not find it time-consuming or overly burdensome.

As a result of Maine's years of experience on the process, there has never been a substantiated case of voter fraud due to Election Day registration according to the Maine Office of the Attorney General's Investigation Division. There were over 751,000 ballots cast in Maine for November 2004 with only 464 ballots challenged. I am aware of two registrations were challenged during close elections as part of a recount process. Both were found to be unintentional, where the voter was registered in two towns, but in both cases they had only voted in one town.

- What is the impact?

In 1972, Maine's voter turnout was 21st in the country with about 60% of the vote. Ever since then Maine has ranked in the top 10 in the country. Maine ranked second in 2000 and 2004 only to Minnesota, another state that has Election Day Registration.

MAINE'S VOTER TURNOUT

YEAR	NATIONAL RANKING	PERCENT
1972	21	60.3%
1992	1	73.1%
1996	1	64.1%
2000	2	67.7%
2004	2	73.8%

On a more personal note let me tell you about a young woman who came to the polls on Stevens Avenue in Portland two years ago when I was serving as the Deputy Registrar at that polling site for the day. It was snowy and cold, and just before the polls closed. She was very pregnant and accompanied by her husband and father-in-law. They had told her she could register that day and vote. She was unsure and hesitant as she approached the table, her husband and father-in-law had gone on into the booths to vote. As I guided her through the form she became more and more excited. She said, "You mean I can really vote today? It's my first time, you know." It was a wonderful moment for me knowing that she was exercising that fundamental right, empowered to be a part of the election just like the rest of her family that day. I helped many other people become voters that day, young people, brand new citizens, new neighbors, but none made the impact that one young woman did.

Election Day registration is a proven tool to provide access to a fundamental cornerstone of democracy, the right and responsibility to cast your vote. I urge you today to vote in favor of allowing the constituents you represent, all of them, to register to vote without artificial barriers. Please support Election Day Registration. Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.