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MERRILL, REGISTRARS OF VOTERS ASSOCIATION PRAISE BIPARTISAN GAE COMMITTEE PASSAGE OF BILL STRENGTHENING CONNECTICUT ELECTIONS

SECRETARY OF THE STATE WORKS TOGETHER WITH CONNECTICUT REGISTRARS TO
SUPPORT SB 1051 IMPROVING PROFESSIONALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF LOCAL
ELECTION OFFICIALS

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Denise Merrill today joined the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut in praising the legislative Government Administration and Elections Committee's passage of Senate Bill No. 1051 "*An Act Strengthening Connecticut Elections.*" By an overwhelming vote of 13-2, the GAE committee approved a bill that will increase accountability and professionalism among Connecticut's registrars of voters who are primarily charged with the responsibility of administering elections in Connecticut. Secretary Merrill had sought legislation to redefine the position of Registrar from two partisan, elected positions for each city and town to a professional hired locally by municipalities. In a compromise reached with the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC), SB 1051 leaves registrars as locally elected officials, but mandates training and certification, requires elections officials to follow the instructions of the secretary of the state, and provides for a removal process in the event of malfeasance or extreme neglect of duty. The bill also allows the Secretary of the State to temporarily relieve a Registrar of Voters from duty who has failed to meet required certification or is the subject of an investigation of any matter related to their duties. If the bill is enacted, Registrars of Voters will be required to pass a certification test and undergo yearly professional development and training, with failure to do so grounds for removal from office.

"After a lot of hard work, I am very grateful that we have bipartisan support for a very strong proposal that will greatly improve elections for Connecticut voters," said Secretary Merrill, Connecticut's chief elections official. "I have said from the beginning that we need more professionalism and accountability in how we run elections in Connecticut, and this bill accomplishes that. I thank the ROVAC for working with GAE chairs Senator Steve Cassano and Representative Ed Jutila and my office to come up with a fair compromise that would mandate

that registrars be certified and complete yearly training, and imposes real consequences for incompetence or neglect in carrying out their duties. In the end we all want the same thing: the best possible Election Day experience for Connecticut's nearly two million registered voters. This bill also paves the way for some long-needed modernization and technological improvements to the voting process in Connecticut, something we have sought for years. I urge the General Assembly to support this terrific forward progress for election administration."

Melissa Russell, President of the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut, said, "ROVAC commends the GAE committee and the Secretary of the State for finding common ground in addressing issues vital to the integrity of our democratic process. The removal of cumbersome reporting requirements, the implementation of a certification program for registrars and the addition of accountability factors for situations where the local election officials are not meeting the public's expectations are all important parts of this new proposal. SB 1051 as approved by the GAE committee will reflect today's expectations of voters and will modernize Connecticut's elections."

In addition to introducing new accountability and professionalization standards for registrars of voters, SB 1051 also quickens election results reporting by separating results from other statistics that often take longer to gather and report. The also streamlines voter registration deadlines to one week prior to Election Day, and permits local election officials to sign in voters online who are participating in Election Day Registration. The mandated training and certification for registrars of voters would be designed and implemented by the Secretary of the State's office. Under this bill, for a registrar to be removed from office, a complaint would have to be filed with the state's attorney, who would then investigate and determine whether to file an action in Superior Court recommending removal from office. A full hearing would follow. The bill moves to Senate floor, and may be referred to other committee before being taken up for a vote in that chamber.