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MERRILL: UNANIMOUS STATE SENATE PASSAGE OF BILL STRENGTHENING CONNECTICUT ELECTIONS A MAJOR VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY

SECRETARY OF THE STATE AND CONNECTICUT REGISTRARS OF VOTERS
PRAISE PASSAGE OF SB 1051 TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONALISM AND
ACCOUNTABILITY OF LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIALS

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Denise Merrill today joined the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC) in praising the Connecticut State Senate for unanimously passing Senate Bill No. 1051 “*An Act Strengthening Connecticut Elections.*” With a vote of 36-0, State Senators of both political parties approved the bill to enhance accountability and professionalism among Connecticut’s Registrars of Voters, who are charged with administering elections in Connecticut. Secretary Merrill and ROVAC are urging House lawmakers to pass SB 1051 and send it to the desk of Governor Dannel P. Malloy. The bill mandates training and certification for locally elected Registrars, 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 attain 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 certification courses and undergo yearly professional development and training, with failure to do so grounds for removal from office.

“The State Senate’s unanimous passage of this landmark bill is a major victory for democracy and for Connecticut voters,” said Secretary Merrill, Connecticut’s chief elections official. “I am grateful for the partnership with the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut and for the leadership of Senator Steve Cassano for helping to

bring this bill forward for a vote. I urge the House to pass this bill as quickly as possible – it is a very strong, bipartisan proposal that will greatly improve elections for Connecticut voters. If this bill becomes law we will have more professionalism and accountability in how we run elections in Connecticut. It requires that registrars be certified and complete yearly training, and imposes real consequences for incompetence or neglect in carrying out their duties. 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 House to pass Senate Bill No. 1051 as soon as possible before the end of the session so we can keep up the momentum for modernizing and professionalizing election administration in Connecticut.”

Melissa Russell, president of ROVAC, said, “The passage of SB 1051 gives registrars the technological tools and educational opportunities that will help strengthen and modernize our elections, while maintaining a bipartisan structure in our offices. The Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC) looks forward to working with the Secretary of the State in implementing the various changes and advancements that this bill puts forward.”

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 bill unifies voter registration deadlines to one week prior to Election Day, and permits local election officials to use the online voter registration system to enroll residents who are participating in Election Day Registration (EDR), which should help reduce EDR waiting times on Election Day. 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, the Secretary would refer a potential removal matter to the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC), who would investigate and determine whether the case should be referred to the Attorney General. After review, if it is determined removal is warranted, the Attorney General may bring an action in Superior Court seeking removal. A full hearing before a Superior Court judge would follow. The bill now moves to the House of Representatives. The regular session of the General Assembly adjourns under constitutional mandate on June 3, 2015.