



DENISE W. MERRILL
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

December 5, 2018

Testimony

AN ACT RESTORING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES TO PEOPLE CONVICTED OF FELONIES WHO ARE ON PAROLE AND REQUIRING A STUDY OF VOTING BY ELEGIBLE PERSONS IN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION FACILITIES.

I want to thank the Sentencing Commission for the opportunity to comment on the draft proposal regarding voter rights for people on parole, and the participation of those eligible voters who are in Department of Correction Facilities.

As you know, currently, people on probation are allowed to register and vote, but people on parole are not. I support a change in the law to grant voting rights to people on parole and appreciate you lending your voice to this important legislative issue. Re-enfranchising people who are returning from incarceration helps to promote a self-image of good citizenship. I firmly believe that our democracy and our country is strongest when more people have access to the ballot box and make their voice heard and therefore proposals to extend the franchise are always a top priority for my agency.

The second section of your proposal, however, raises some concerns. Past discussions between our offices have identified some challenges to facilitation of voting and voter registration for eligible incarcerated people and I believe that is what this proposed study is designed to address. However, I will be proposing her own legislative proposals that will be addressing these obstacles, making the proposed study unnecessary.

The deadline of the study, October 2019, is also problematic as it is within the most difficult times of the calendar year for our agency to participate in such a study. That also underscores our concern that the proposal lacks the necessary resources for our office to do a study such as this. It would be very unorthodox for someone other than the Secretary of the State to be the lead author of a study relating to the administration of elections since I serve as the state's chief election official. Our agency, has seen a significant reduction in personnel in recent years, and while we certainly share the goals of the proposal we are forced to prioritize. The agency is not in a position to add a new project without necessary resources to support that mandate, and so I further object to the language that we will undertake the project within available appropriations. I believe the priority is in the legislative proposals we are already planning to submit that will address these issues directly.

In closing, we look forward to collaborating with the Sentencing Commission on the expansion of voting rights to those people on parole; a policy that would create immediate positive impact. I hope you can also understand our concerns regarding your language of a study that we judge to be unnecessary.