



To: Hon. Ruth Hardy, Chair, Senate Committee on Government Operations  
From: Jim Dandeneau, Executive Director, Vermont Democratic Party  
Re: H.429 Draft 1.2

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Dear Senate Committee on Government Operations,

My name is Jim Dandeneau and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Democratic Party. The VDP works to engage Vermonters in the political process at every level, from encouraging participation in Town Meeting Day all the way up to recruiting, training, and supporting candidates running for public office. We have party members holding leadership positions in about half of the towns in Vermont, in cities and towns ranging from Burlington to Maidstone, with robust, active party organizations in every county.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the latest draft of the miscellaneous elections bill, H.429. With 2024 being a presidential election year and all of the work that entails, both from an elections administration perspective and a party building one, we have a busy two years ahead of us, but this bill will make it easier for voters to cast informed ballots, and for parties to encourage participation in our entire process.

The Sore Loser Law is very helpful in streamlining the election process. The primary process in Vermont is very open, encouraging voters to speak their minds early in the election and encouraging strong, hard-working candidates. However, the quirk of our election law that allows candidates who lose primaries to try and grab other ballot lines forces voters to occasionally have to reiterate their choices and muddies the waters in a general election. This section provides clarity to voters casting their ballots in a general election who might be confused by the fact that someone they already voted against, who lost, is appearing again on the ballot.

Reporting the names of town and county committee members is an additional data point for voters that helps them understand who may be running for office, and who might be supporting those candidates. As it stands right now, a Democratic town chair could choose to enter the Republican primary for a state House seat, and the only evidence that would exist pointing to that person's status as a town chair would be if that person publicly identified themselves somewhere as the town chair. We don't list those names on our web site, and the Secretary of State is not required to collect that information. This change would provide that additional data point.

With regard to the changes to campaign finance limits, there is some disagreement among campaign finance professionals in the state about what counts as a contribution and what is the

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sale of an object of value. This confusion does not exist at a federal level, because federal campaign finance law allows for unlimited transfers between parties and party candidates - the question of what is the sale of something of value becomes entirely academic, because all of the money transferred between parties and candidates is subject to reporting, but does not hit a campaign contribution limit. Under state law, this confusion continues to exist. This section would clarify that distinction, rendering it academic at the state level as well, while retaining crucial reporting requirements that provide transparency for voters.

The VDP greatly appreciated the House amendment altering the demographic disclosure section to prevent public disclosure of specific candidates with their demographic data. Diversifying our slate of public officials is crucially important, but the threat of harassment is very real, even here in Vermont. Aggregating the data and depersonalizing it helps us understand better who is running and how we are doing in our work to diversify our government, while protecting those candidates for office from bad faith actors.

I think the updated requirements around write-in candidates will result in a net positive for our system. We saw in Franklin County last year a candidate sneak through on both lines who all of us would have liked to remove, but because it was so easy to claim the Democratic line, our collective recourse was to spend time and money on a doomed write-in effort in the general election. Revamping these rules might have made it more possible for an alternative solution to that issue, while also encouraging future candidates to be serious about their candidacies, rather than trying to grab a ballot line on a last minute bit of gamesmanship.

Finally, the Vermont Democratic Party strongly supports the electronic ballot return piece of the bill. Currently, Vermont voters living abroad are required to return their ballots in the mail, subjecting their votes to potential service disruptions and high postage. Currently, 33 states and the District of Columbia (with all varieties of political leanings, from deep blue California to deep red Oklahoma) allow overseas voters to return their paper ballots electronically. These returned ballots have a paper trail, and many of the states that allow for electronic return have those ballots opened on secure computers by bipartisan pairs of election officials, similar to how Justices of the Peace deliver absentee ballots here in Vermont. Allowing electronic return of ballots would make it easier and less costly for Vermonters working or serving their country abroad to participate in our elections. Our Secretary of State's office contains within it the most capable election administrators in the country. I trust their honesty, integrity, thoroughness and diligence implicitly, and when they say they can manage counting electronically returned ballots, I am certain that will be the case.