

Testimony for S.29 – Election Day Registration
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I was first elected to the position of Barre City Clerk & Treasurer in 2008, and my first elections were the 2008 primary and general elections. Following the general election, a defeated candidate filed a challenge. I spent hours preparing my testimony and compiling data, and time in court defending my actions and those of the City.

In the end we prevailed and the election results were upheld. However, that experience – especially so early in my career as a clerk – left me with an appreciation for – if not an obsession about - the integrity of elections.

On its face, Election Day Registration (EDR) seems like a wonderful way to increase voter participation, however, there are a number of reasons why it is not practical at this time:

- One reason is the lack of statewide, universal broadband. Election Day Registration would expand ways for people to register and vote in more than one community on Election Day. If EDR were the law, it would be vital for town clerks to have live access to the statewide voter checklist at the polls to prevent voter fraud. Many clerks do not have such access at the moment due to the lack of universal broadband coverage throughout the state, the lack of internet connections at polling places, and/or the lack of equipment necessary to access the statewide checklist. During the negotiations on last year's election bill, S.86, we all agreed on the limitations of the current system, and modified the language about election night reporting – acknowledging the lack of universal access and the limitations inherent therein. And with all due respect to Secretary Condos, he acknowledged the importance of universal access to the statewide checklist in his January 20th testimony, when he said in part, “For those who are concerned about voter fraud ... anyone who attempts to vote twice would be found out by the voter checklist.”** Only universal access would allow us to find out if someone is attempting to vote twice during the voting rather than after the fact.

- Another reason to wait is the pending rollout of the new statewide voter checklist and election reporting system. I have been privileged to be one of several clerks from around the state working with the Secretary of State's office on the creation of a system that will enhance the statewide checklist, provide online voter registration capability, and allow for faster election reporting. The system is ready to go live and the Secretary's office has scheduled workshops throughout the summer to train clerks on the new system. The length of the workshops – 3 ½ days each – is testament to the fact that the new system will require significant training and a steep learning curve. The first time we will implement the new system will be Town Meeting Day, 2016, when we will also be holding the Presidential Preference Primary, followed by the August primary and November general elections. It seems ill advised to bring EDR on line at the same time.

It is likely that there will come a time when Election Day Registration is a viable option for Vermont, however, that time is not yet here. We need time to implement the new statewide voter checklist system coming on line over the next year. And we need to move towards universal broadband access at all polling places. I understand the impetus behind EDR, and support expanding opportunities for people to participate. However, it must be balanced with the practicality of the mechanics, and the need to ensure the integrity of the process.

As a clerk, I hold it as one of my most sacred duties to conduct fair, legal and honest elections, and I look to the legislature to help me in my work by not compromising the levels of oversight built into the current system. The integrity of the election process should be our common – and paramount - goal.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee might have.

** Complete 1/20/15 Secretary Condos quote:

“• Second: Remove the voter ID requirement.

- This goes against the spirit of the Vermont Statutes (17 VSA 2145(c)) that puts the burden on the voter and explicitly prohibits the Municipality from taking these actions.
- Additionally, for those who are concerned about voter fraud, I would point out that ID would be a duplicate effort as anyone who attempts to vote twice would be found out by the voter checklist.”