

Town of Middlebury  
Town Clerk's Office  
94 Main Street  
Middlebury VT 05753

March 10, 2015

Senator Christopher Bray  
Committee Clerk Cheryl Ewen  
Senate Government Operations Committee  
Cc: Senator Claire Ayer  
Representative Betty Nuovo  
Representative Amy Sheldon

Senator Bray,

I am writing to you in your capacity as Senator of Addison County and as a member of the Senate Government Operations Committee. My interest today is regarding S.29 an act allowing Election Day voter registration. I know it must be confusing at times to take testimony from numerous constituents with differing opinions and be able to evaluate what is the best direction to move forward.

So let me first thank you for taking the time to read my letter and to thoughtfully consider my opinions. I am currently opposed to this change in law being enacted. I have served as Town Clerk for the Town of Middlebury for the past thirteen years and it is my understanding from Clerk's who have served their communities much longer than I that prior to that time very few election laws and practices changed over several years. And although I believe it is always beneficial to evaluate how our laws best serve and protect the rights of the public Vermont should be proud of the reputation it has maintained for running elections of high integrity.

Over the past decade as other State's have floundered with election procedures and military and overseas voters have been disenfranchised Federal Laws have been enacted which impact the procedures we follow in the small State of Vermont. As the Presiding Election Officials for our communities we have been mandated to maintain a Statewide Checklist, to promote early voting and provide access to voting for as much as 45 days prior to an election as well as right up to the day before an election. And we prepare for vote-by-phone for each State & Federal election.

In an effort to encourage voter participation the deadline to register to vote has already been shortened from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday prior to an election to the Wednesday before the election. At first glance this appears to be a fairly simple and straightforward change. The reality for my office means that instead of receiving a packet of voter registrations from the Secretary of State during the week prior to the election we receive a packet on Monday the day before the election. In 2008 we received a packet with several hundred registrations the day before the General Election.

I can't say exactly how other towns handle the administration of their elections, but I do know that in Addison County Middlebury is the largest town by population. Middlebury is the largest town, but we

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are still a small town. We are at a size where we are still expected to handle any additional demands for anything we do without increasing staff. Preparation for an election has many administrative components: registering voters, receiving petitions, preparing ballots, testing tabulators, preparing the checklist, posting Warnings, scheduling and training poll workers, and on and on. And in most Vermont towns for the Presiding Election Official it is also physically demanding: setting up the polling place with voting booths, tabulators, stanchions, tables, chairs, computers, transporting ballots, supplies, etc.

I would like very much to feel excited about elections. I would like to do everything possible to encourage people to participate in elections and especially local government, but each new mandate either adds a new expense to the town or creates a burden of labor. While clerks are preparing for and administering elections it frequently means that other duties of their office are neglected or postponed. This includes land records and vital records. Many clerks also hold the office of Treasurer for their towns.

Historically clerks were compensated by fees. Most towns have moved to a system of compensating clerks through payroll and fees are handed over to the General Funds of the town. As a clerk I collect fees for recording land records, issuing vital records and licenses, but do not collect any fees for elections. We have been given only one option for voting tabulators thus creating a monopoly which hinders any competitive pricing for supplies and programming. As more and more of the clerk's time is used to administer elections, the cost of programming tabulators and mailing early ballots continues to rise a method of compensation to relieve the burden to the towns should be considered, especially if it becomes necessary to enlist the help of additional staff or election officials. At this time I believe that adding the Election Day voter registration would add another expense and burden to the towns and the town clerks.

I encourage you and the committee to consider looking at Vermont's election process as a whole package rather than adding seemingly simple procedures one at a time. I also encourage you to strongly consider the perspective of the Presiding Election Officials who are on the front lines of the process. If you have questions or would like any clarification about the cost or increased labor to the town of Middlebury, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ann F. Webster,  
Middlebury Town Clerk