

Date: March 12, 2015
To: Vermont Legislature
From: Donna Kinville, City Clerk

RE: Election Day Voter Registration

What would a perfect world look like? I think all of would like there to be no pollution, no crime, no homeless, no one suffering from pain, medical services for all, and no hungry adults or children! Unfortunately, there is no perfect world. Why? We have all made decisions on the personal level whether or not to give to a charity or a homeless person panhandling for money? Corporations make decisions that affect their workers, vendors, and their community. Politicians try to balance what is best for their constituents and the ability to pay for those basic needs. In these times, everything is a balancing act and everyone is trying to make more things happen with less money. We know that many state and local municipal employees have not had a pay raise or one that even keeps with the CPI just to keep their citizens taxes down and municipalities attempting to keep budgets even with last years expenditures. The voters spoke loud and clear last year that tax reform needs to happen but with mandates constantly coming down through Montpelier, it is putting a burden on local towns to keep their budgets level funded. People and citizens are being forced to take a deep long look into their lives and pocketbooks to see where changes can be made. Now you are making the municipalities make more cuts just to register voters who can't take the time to register prior to Election Day?

All of these facts made me question why would we even consider passing any legislation that has limited benefits to the masses but has a cost impact? Election Day Voter Registration is such a bill. I want to make something perfectly clear - I am all for getting the voters to the polls and getting them to help shape their municipality, state and country but I am even more for maintaining or even improving the integrity of the election.

Here are a few stats from the past few years:

Presidential 2008 – DMV affirmation forms were filled out but 12 had some major piece of information missing. I made a copy and sent the original out to the people and 8 of those 12 were returned to me due to no one at that address and the other 4 never responded. I also had 6 people attempt to vote 2 times by absentee ballots.

Presidential 2012 – we added 127 voters who used the DMV affirmation form and out of those 94 people have never voted in the City since - that is 71%. Were they actual citizens of the City at the time of the election???

March 2015 – voter fraud was averted due to me following through. A father requested absentee ballots for his family and all were returned. A remove notice was received from another town for 2 of the kids and knowing that they had already had their absentee ballots returned I called the other town and they had requested absentee ballots there but timing was right and they were able to pull the ballots before they were mailed. On Election Day we cannot stop this from happening, they could have walked right into the polls and voted.

I have several reasons why EDVR is not for Vermont. You will be hearing many great arguments for why EDVR is not a good idea from the people who actually perform the job. They will be from small towns to larger cities. No one is going to say it's because of the increased work load but they will mention the money aspect of it because in these times, every penny is watched. You will hear that it will cause long lines at the polls and we are worried that voters will be disenfranchised because of the delay in casting their vote. I have heard estimates that 10% of my voters will turn up on Election Day to vote. That means that I will have about 1,200 people show up on Election Day. The majority of these people would have registered to vote

prior to Election Day under the current law. Depending on the speed of the state-wide voter checklist it can take over 4 minutes to create and save a new voter which would cost the city an additional 80-90 hours to input these people and then an additional 10-20 hours verifying the information and then add the cost of mailing out a copy of the approved form. This cannot be done with the current staff levels that we have and additional help would be required.

This is not just a clerk issue - this is a municipality issue. If this bill passes the City of South Burlington will close the Clerk's office on Election Day so that staff can be the leader of registering voters at the polls. The people working the EDVR table need to know the addresses in South Burlington, what are commercial properties that do not contain living quarters and make sure that the information collected on the application is complete. Is this fair to the other residents of the City who come to city hall to prepare for the sale of a home on Election Day? No. Is it fair to someone who needs to get a birth or marriage certificate on Election Day? NO. Is it fair to someone who wants to register their dog on Election Day? NO.

As I attempt to take a step back and look at this whole issue with all it's pros and cons, I still wonder why are attempting to get people who don't seem to care enough about the election to see if they are registered? There is nothing that you or I can do that will get a 100% participation rate for Vermont. People will say that they didn't know that there was an election. No matter what political party you consider yourself a part of, no matter what social status you consider yourself can prevent you from seeing the signs of candidates scattered around the state, hear the ads taken out on radio, TV or seen in the newspapers (including local newspapers), the news programs, the flyers left on your door or in your mail and say that you were unaware of an election and not question if you were registered to vote at your current address.

Instead of putting the burden of registering to vote on Election Day, let's work on fixing the problems that we have. Let's educate our citizens by being an advocate instead of trying to patchwork a small but vital piece of the election process. We can blitz the airwaves, TV's with public service announcement, go into the schools and register voters, work with agencies which advocate for the various sections of our citizens and get them involved. Let's not disenfranchise those voters that we already have in an attempt to increase our voter turnout.

Please listen to the people who take the time to ensure the elections integrity remains intact.

I believe that maintaining the integrity of our elections is the only true way to increase voter participation.

Thank you.