



**State of Vermont
Office of the Secretary of State**

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**Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State
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**Elections Division
Seán Sheehan, Director**

March 20, 2025

**To: Hon. Matthew Birong, Chair
House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs**

From: Sean Sheehan, Director, Elections and Campaign Finance

Re: Following up on question in March 20th testimony

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about our office's strong objection to moving the independent filing deadline to after the statewide primary. We object both on the grounds of intense demands on my team at the proposed time and on the risk to Vermont's statutorily mandated universal vote by mail schedule.

In this morning's testimony, Representative Hango asked for the number of candidates who file with the Secretary of State's office to run as independents. The number is highly variable. Excluding independent presidential candidates, who must file by the earlier deadline of August 1st, we had 49 file in 2022 and 23 in 2024. 2020 was even higher – 70 – possibly because of COVID election law changes. I am providing a table of the number of candidates by office and year on the next page. Considering that each candidate is required to gather between 50 and 500 signatures, depending on office, this adds up to several thousand signatures for my small team to review.

My team is able to manage this significant workload as long as we slot it in between the other workflows I shared in our [late summer calendar](#), specifically the current timing during the relatively calm week before the primary. It would not be manageable to add to the following week's workload. The week after the primary is arguably our busiest week of the year, packed with assisting clerks on election reporting and canvasses, preparing to certify the elections, answering questions on recounts and challenges, and preparing the general election ballot files. If the deadline were to be moved and I was not appropriated additional staff, our ability to manage the election certification and support clerks would be compromised.

I also want to reiterate that the resource and workload timing challenge is only one issue. The bigger issue is the rigidity of the general election ballot preparation, printing, and mailing calendar. Preparing, printing, and mailing 450,000 ballots consisting of 283 different ballot styles is a huge job. This work requires many interdependent workflows that must be completed and doublechecked. The ballots must be prepared and then proofed by multiple people on my team, town clerks, and our tabulator company.

The ballot styles are then sent to our printer who conducts another review. All of this has to occur before printing, stuffing, and mailing the ballots. That last step takes weeks in itself. Even if we were appropriated additional staff, we would still face the reality of this calendar.

Again, our office strongly objects to moving the independent filing deadline to be after the statewide primary. Moving this deadline would put tremendous stress on an already delicately managed tight timeline. We know this exposes our office to the potential to make errors or not catch something that needs to be fixed. We would be happy to answer any other questions.

Independent Candidates Filed with SOS (excl. Pres.)	2020	2022	2024
US SENATOR	0	5	3
REPRESENTATIVE TO CONGRESS	6	3	1
GOVERNOR	6	3	2
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR	3	0	0
STATE TREASURER	2	0	0
SECRETARY OF STATE	2	0	0
AUDITOR OF ACCOUNTS	1	0	0
ATTORNEY GENERAL	1	0	0
STATE SENATOR	15	4	7
STATE REPRESENTATIVE	28	15	9
PROBATE JUDGE	0	4	0
ASSISTANT JUDGE	0	5	0
STATE'S ATTORNEY	0	2	0
SHERIFF	0	4	0
HIGH BAILIFF	6	4	1
Total	70	49	23