



Town of Panton Chartered 1761

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Dear Chair Birong and honorable members of the Government Operations and Military Affairs Committee,

I am unable to provide in-person testimony on H. 953; however, I wanted to submit this written statement for your consideration.

In early 2025, a concerned resident presented a petition to the Town Clerk proposing to amend the Town Charter to allow for the recall of elected officers. Due to some ambiguity in statute regarding submission timelines, the petition was unfortunately deemed invalid. Separately, a second petition proposed amending the Town Charter to increase the Selectboard from three to five members. Following a reappraisal and a significant budget increase, some residents felt underrepresented by their Selectboard, likely the impetus behind both proposals.

The Selectboard determined that expanding its size from three to five members could be enacted through the statutory process, and that petition was withdrawn with the Selectboard's assurance that the item would appear on the ballot. The Selectboard also held several discussions with concerned citizens regarding the proposed recall amendment and, in a gesture of goodwill, voted to call a Special Town Meeting at a date and time that would allow the charter amendment to be legally considered. When the ballot question increasing Selectboard size passed at regular Town Meeting in March, it was decided that elections for the two new seats would be held at that same Special Town Meeting.

I offer this background because it leads directly to the charter amendment you are now considering. While sympathetic to the intent behind the original proposal, the Selectboard was concerned that low participation at Special Town Meetings held outside the regularly scheduled March date could result in officials being recalled by far fewer votes than originally elected them. We took it upon ourselves to revise the proposed amendment with that protective threshold in mind and submitted it to voters for their approval, which they granted in May 2025.

We believe this commonsense provision is an important safeguard for small towns where voter participation is inherently limited. The Special Town Meeting held to elect two new Selectboard members and vote on the charter amendment drew significantly lower turnout



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than our regular Town Meeting, underscoring the point. We support holding all officials accountable to the voters who put them in office, but reasonable care should be taken to ensure such decisions reflect the true will of the majority, or at least a significant plurality of the electorate. We ask that you give serious consideration to H. 953 and honor the wishes of Panton voters.

Thank you, and please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Zach Weaver
Chairperson, Panton Selectboard