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STREAMLINED MOTOR-VOTER SYSTEM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HARTFORD: The Secretary of the State's office issued the following fact sheet regarding an agreement to streamline the state's motor-voter registration system.

Secretary of the State Denise Merrill said, "It is important that everyone understand the facts before reacting prematurely to a proposal that will modernize voter registration but is still two years away from being operational. A very serious issue was brought to my attention, namely that federally required interagency voter registration coordination was lacking. As the state's chief elections official I am duty-bound to fix these kinds of problems and to prevent a potentially expensive lawsuit. So we are proposing the most innovative, efficient and cost-effective solution available in order to protect the state. I simply cannot stand by and do nothing."

Below are facts about Secretary of the State Denise Merrill's proposal to streamline motor-voter registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Is this a new function for the DMV?

- No. That responsibility is actually 23-years-old. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 requires the DMV to give people the opportunity to register to vote simultaneously when they carry out a transaction with the agency. The state is also required to send the voter registration to the appropriate official at the local level. This law states:

"[E]ach State shall establish procedures to register to vote in elections for Federal office— **(1) by application made simultaneously with an application for a motor vehicle driver's license ...**"

“Each State shall include a voter registration application form for elections for Federal office as part of an application for a State motor vehicle driver’s license.”

“[A] completed voter registration portion of an application for a State motor vehicle driver’s license accepted at a State motor vehicle authority **shall be transmitted to the appropriate State election official not later than 10 days after the date of acceptance.**

(2) If a registration application is accepted within 5 days before the last day for registration to vote in an election, the application shall be transmitted to the appropriate State election official not later than 5 days after the date of acceptance.”

So if this federal law has been required since 1993, is Connecticut complying?

- Connecticut’s performance has been lagging for some time. The federal government monitors compliance and where registrations are accepted. Connecticut’s DMV has ranked near the bottom (see page 80: http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/Page/2014_EAC_EAVS_Comprehensive_Report_508_Compliant.pdf). In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice recently threatened a lawsuit to improve performance. Any delays in implementing this program potentially exposes Connecticut to lengthy and expensive litigation.

Is this the only option?

- No. By the letter of the law, Connecticut could enforce a strict paper-based system in which the DMV staff person proactively offers and assists each customer in obtaining and completing a paper voter registration application and then transmits the completed form via postal mail to the appropriate elections official on the customer’s behalf. This would INCREASE wait times at the Department of Motor Vehicles and cost the public MORE MONEY for printing, postage and labor. However, if an automated system is blocked, an antiquated paper system could be Connecticut’s only option to comply with the law.

Are there software concerns with automating the system?

- There is a lot to be determined but the goal is to link up the existing online voter registration system with the DMV application process. The Secretary of the State’s online voter registration system has been in existence for two years and has registered more than 100,000 voters without any major mishaps. However, the memorandum of agreement between the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Secretary of the State proposes a study to determine precisely what is needed to automate the system.

Why isn’t this being done by legislation?

- The Secretary of the State proposed legislation and gave detailed testimony at a public hearing. The Government Administration and Elections Committee voted out joint favorable substitute language requiring SOTS and DMV to collaborate in a way reflected

in the MOU. The bill died in the Transportation Committee. The functions set out in the MOU are administrative, and the timeline set out in the MOU. The system still affords ample time for legislative consultation and input. Additionally, the Department of Justice letter underscores the need for prompt, administrative action.

The issue of undocumented people registering has been raised. Is this a concern?

- The online voter registration system already interacts with the DMV in order to verify the identity of the applicant. It electronically accesses the DMV's database to identify the person filling out a voter registration form. However, this system DOES NOT recognize so-called "drive only," license holders, those holding operator licenses issued to undocumented persons. Any attempt to register with a drive only license would be unsuccessful under the current online voter registration system. As the proposal envisions using as much of the existing technology as possible, there is no reason to think that this potentially registers ineligible people.

Surely this will cost money?

- On the contrary, streamlining motor-voter registration SAVES MONEY. In the jurisdictions where this system has been automated, it saved money on printing, postage and labor. [Delaware, which automated its system in 2008, created \\$200,000 in annual savings.](#)