



## Office of the Secretary of the State

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# Connecticut General Assembly Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee General Obligation Bonding Subcommittee

April 10, 2023

## TESTIMONY OF SECRETARY OF THE STATE STEPHANIE THOMAS:

Thank you Co-Chairs Moore and Napoli, Ranking Members Hwang and Piscopo, and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

We are before you today to request bonding funds for three critical projects that together will modernize our election infrastructure, increase ease and access to the process of registering to vote, and provide businesses with a more streamlined interaction with our state government.

### ➤ BALLOT TABULATORS

We are requesting \$25 million in bonding funds for the Office of the Secretary of the State to purchase new ballot tabulators for use in elections in each municipality statewide. The current tabulators in use were purchased well over a decade ago and have since exceeded their useful life. As many of you are likely aware, these machines have become unreliable and unserviceable. From frequent jamming, to weather-related issues caused by rain and heat, to their antiquated technology, election officials struggle each election to process ballots efficiently.

Additionally, the company that produced the existing machines has since gone out of business. As a result, it is impossible to source new replacement parts, with officials currently being forced to cannibalize parts from similar machines that other states have discarded. This is no way a state that values our democracy should be administering its elections.

It is critical that we purchase 3,000 tabulators to shore up our election infrastructure statewide. This is not just a nice to have quantity, but statutorily required. To break that number down for you, Connecticut's 169 towns operate 750 polling locations. Many towns require more than one tabulator per location based on the volume of voters. Statutorily separated from polling places

are 169 Election Day Registration locations - one in each town. There are also separate counting locations for Absentee Ballots. And to give you a sense of volume, the city of Stamford processed almost 5,000 absentee ballots in the 2022 election.

Under statute, each tabulator must have a backup as a redundancy in the case of a machine failure on the day of the election.

We also believe it would be prudent for the state to purchase some extra tabulators to avoid a future repeat of the situation we currently find ourselves in with regards to unobtainable replacements.

Our submitted materials break down the specific costs related to this purchase, which includes not only the tabulators themselves, but also the secure ballot boxes, ink cartridges and memory sticks for the machines, the software license from the developer, as well as delivery and installation. Additionally, we are proposing the purchase of 10 high-speed tabulators and 30 medium-speed tabulators to deploy in the larger municipalities to assist with the end of the night counting of large sums of absentee ballots.

➤ **CENTRALIZED VOTER REGISTRATION SYSTEM/AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION**

We are requesting \$1.7 million to implement Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) in each of the state agencies that have been identified as Voter Registration Agencies, and to integrate Connecticut's existing AVR framework into the new Centralized Voter Registration System (CVRS), which is in the process of being programmed.

This expansion of AVR is required pursuant to Public Act 21-2 and will occur at the Department of Social Services, ConneCT, UConn, the Connecticut State Universities, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. AVR is currently being utilized at the Department of Motor Vehicles, and accounts for approximately 60% of annual voter registrations.

The costs our office has identified include the AVR system itself, implementation programming within each of the identified agencies, subject matter expert consultants to assist in implementation, and the CVRS system integration for the existing DMV AVR system. The specific costs are broken down in the presentation we have provided.

For additional context, we would note that bonding funds were previously provided in order to implement the initial "Motor Voter" AVR program with the DMV beginning in 2018. The price tag for this year's proposed expansions undershoot the \$1.9 million spent to implement the initial program at the DMV, while extending this extremely popular program to six more state agencies and scores more of Connecticut residents.

➤ BUSINESS SERVICES DIVISION UPGRADES

Lastly, we are requesting \$2.4 million to complete our office's migration from the previous CONCORD business registry to Connecticut's Business One Stop platform. This system has been operational since June 2021 and we are now ready for Phase 2. This includes creating a centralized trade name registry for municipalities as well as developing solutions to allow users to manage their payment methods for future transactions.

Additionally, planned improvements include enhancing identity verification and other security measures to mitigate fraud. These changes are critical to help combat the increase in fraudulent filings our office has seen since fully migrating the filing process online. By increasing the level of identity security required by the portal, we are confident that unauthorized business records filings and instances of transactions using stolen card data will decrease.

Other planned improvements include creating new streamlined portals for the Finsys filing fee tracking service, processing apostilles and document authentications, tracking requests and authorizations for the use of the state seal, and processing extradition requests from other states. These costs are outlined in our office's presentation, which is attached.

It is my hope that you, too, see the value these requests have for Connecticut residents, voters, and businesses and include these items in your bonding recommendations. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Thank you,



Stephanie Thomas  
Secretary of the State of Connecticut