

# **Voters First Advisory Commission Workshop**

**Wednesday, September 26, 2007**

**Room 203, State House**

## **Commission Members Present:**

**Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis**

**Senator June Gibbs**

**Ken McGill, Pawtucket Board of Canvassers**

**Sue Stenhouse, Governor's Deputy Director of Community Relations**

**Roger Harris, RI Vote Project**

**Jan Ruggiero, Director, Secretary of State's Elections Division**

**Senator Juan Pichardo**

**Robert Kando, Executive Director, Board of Elections**

## **Staff Members Present:**

**Pamela Lombardi, Administrative Assistant**

**Chris Barnett, Communications Director**

**Mark Welch, Esquire, Legal Counsel**

## **General Public Present:**

**Amy Vitale, ACLU**

**Joan Garceau, Resident of Narragansett**

**Ari Savitzky, FairVote RI**

## **Summary of Meeting:**

- 1. Secretary Mollis opened the meeting at 2:15 P.M.**
- 2. Secretary of State staff members distributed the following handouts to the Commissioners:**
  - a. Meeting agenda**
  - b. Summary of comments received at public hearings and written comments received.**
  - c. Draft white papers on the following issues:**
    - 1. Voting Booth Privacy (Proposal 4)**
    - 2. No Excuse Absentee Voting (Proposal 7)**
    - 3. Expansion of 50' No-Canvassing Zone (Proposal 5)**

**Secretary Mollis suggested posting the white papers on our website to give the public an opportunity to review them, too.**

**Commissioner Harris submitted a handout from the RI Disability Vote Project. "Recommendation to the Voters First Task Force" calls for providing transportation for all voters to the polls on Election days, opposes Photo ID (if such would create additional barriers for those with disabilities) and early closing of the polls and supports increasing voting booth privacy and split shifts for poll workers (allowing people with disabilities to work the polls).**

**We distributed an article reporting on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to hear a challenge to Indiana's Voter ID law. Commissioner Stenhouse recommended tabling Photo ID until the Supreme Court ruling has been decided.**

**Senator Gibbs would like to see transportation to the polls added to the agenda this year. She also supports split shifts for the poll workers. Commissioners Ruggiero and Kando added that the split shifts are already in effect by law and some municipalities already have this policy. Wardens are exempt from this rule and must work the entire shift.**

**A member of the public – Joan Garceau of Narragansett – asked the Commissioners to introduce themselves.**

**Commissioner Stenhouse suggested the Commission set a deadline for completion of all the draft white papers. Secretary Mollis asked the Commissioners to contact Paul Caranci at their earliest convenience for updates and input to move the issues along to be ready to discuss at the next meeting.**

**Commissioner Ruggiero suggested that fiscal notes be included on white papers. A rough estimate of the expected cost of implementing each proposal.**

### **Citizenship**

**Commissioner Ruggiero stated that only two states ask for physical evidence of citizenship upon registration. Rhode Island's form tracks the national form.**

## **Residency**

**Commissioner Pichardo asked about residency requirement. Discussion on verification of proof of residency by acknowledgement notice after registration takes place. Unless the notice comes back undeliverable, the registration is not challenged. If it does come back undeliverable, the registration is placed on an inactive list until further proof is provided. Homeless people are allowed to vote. Some (as in City of Woonsocket) are registered from the local Board of Canvassers address. "Honor System" in effect, according to Commissioners Ruggiero, Kando and Harris**

## **Photos on Ballot**

**Commissioner Kando stated there are places outside Rhode Island that use photos of candidates on ballots and use photos of voters to confirm their identity and prevent fraud.**

**Commissioner Ruggiero stated that with the current ballot layout in the State of Rhode Island, photos of candidates would increase the size of the ballot to 2-3 pages. Presently, there are 1.5 million ballots printed at 40¢ per ballot. Additional pages would make a significant increase in cost. She will check with other states to see if they use candidate photos on ballot. Photos and information can be posted on the website. Secretary Mollis suggested that the information that gets mailed to voters like referendum guides could possibly include photos of candidates.**

## **White Papers**

**Secretary Mollis reiterated his request that Commissioners contact Paul Caranci with comments on the three draft white papers that were distributed at the meeting. The next meeting will include voting on these three white papers and introducing more draft white papers. The committee agreed to table Photo ID until the Supreme Court rules on the challenge to Indiana's law.**

**Commissioner Stenhouse excused herself from the meeting at 3:05 P.M.**

**Commissioner Ken McGill a Press Release informing the public the white papers will be posted on our website.**

**The next workshop will be held on Wednesday, October 17, at 2 P.M. in Room 203 in the State House. Please contact Paul Caranci on remaining white papers to finalize them and introduce more.**

#### **Timeline to Prepare for Legislation**

**Commissioner Ruggiero reminded Commissioners that the timeline for creation of the 2008 elections calendar is fast approaching. Certain items may affect this calendar. Commissioner Gibbs suggested that the early closing of the polls not change for a Presidential election.**

**Meeting concluded at 3:10 P.M.**

**Minutes taken by: Pamela Lombardi, Executive Assistant to  
Secretary of State**