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Would 'Vote Centers' Work?

REGIONAL VOTING • Idea is saving money in Indiana

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When you vote, does it have to be at your local church or school? Would you travel a little farther to a larger voting center?

A pilot project in three counties in Indiana suggests such arrangements would save the states' 92 counties tens of thousands of dollars in each election, according to a study by the Indiana Fiscal Policy Institute.

Would such an idea work in Connecticut?

Voting centers, an alternative to precinct-based elections, are usually set up in strategic locations and save money because they require fewer workers and voting machines. Centralized electronic voting records are used to ensure security. In some places, centers open before Election Day for early voting. Ideally, vote centers will give local election officials the flexibility to anticipate election turnout and modify the number of locations and the level of staffing.

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz and legislative leaders had preliminary talks on vote centers last year, but no more.

They identified issues that make the idea "somewhat problematic for Connecticut," said Bysiewicz's spokesman Av Harris. If the centers have to be open for weeks before the election with paid staff, that might eliminate the savings. If they were only open on Election Day, that might cause crowding that would discourage voting or make it difficult for workers to assist older or handicapped voters. The change in location could inconvenience voters who travel by public transportation.

And, this being the land of home rule — unlike Indiana we have no counties — even minor changes in polling places usually spark a public outcry.

Even with these caveats, the idea should receive a public airing. We are looking at a massive budget deficit. If regional election centers will save some money, they should be on the table. Perhaps the place to start is with a good idea Ms. Bysiewicz put forward last year, "no excuse" absentee ballots.

That means any registered voter would be able to receive an absentee ballot and vote early if he or she so desired. The bill never came to a vote last year. Pass it. If it reduces the rush on Election Day, perhaps vote centers will make more sense.

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