

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

In the Matter of a Complaint by
Susan A. Koneff, et al, Monroe

File No. 2010-148

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Complainants, Susan A. Koneff & Jeanette K. Benson, respectively the Democratic and Republican Registrars of Voters in the Town of Monroe, brought this Complaint pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 9-7b and alleged that Respondent, Lisa Marie Brennan was not a bona fide resident in Monroe when she cast a ballot there on Election Day November 2, 2010 in violation of General Statutes §§ 9-7b (a)(2)(C), 9-42 & 9-172.

After an investigation of the Complaint, the Commission makes the following findings and conclusions:

1. Complainants here allege that on Election Day, November 2, 2010, the Respondent had been moved to the “inactive” voter list pursuant to General Statutes § 9-35 because she had failed to respond to a canvass letter sent to her registered address in February 2008 and had not cast another ballot during the intervening period.
2. When the Respondent presented herself to vote at her polling place in Monroe on November 2, 2010, she was restored to the active registry list and voted after swearing to and submitting a “Restoration of Voter” form pursuant to General Statutes § 9-42.
3. Complainants submitted evidence that the Respondent had a prior record of being similarly moved to the inactive list and restored at the polling place in 2006.
4. After the aforementioned events, the Respondents allege that they reviewed information about the Respondent from the Monroe Tax Collector that they believe supports a finding that at the time the Respondent cast her ballot, she was not a bona fide resident at her registered address in Monroe, but had moved to Stratford. However, no evidence was submitted by the Complainants in support of the allegation that the tax records suggested that the Respondent was not a bona fide resident of Monroe on the relevant date.
5. The Respondent generally denies the Complainants’ allegation. Moreover, she specifically asserts that she had lived at the registered address in Monroe—her childhood abode and the home at which her parents also reside—her entire life and has voted there ever since achieving the age of majority. While she has stayed with friends in Stratford for certain periods of time, she claims no other home but the property in Monroe as her bona fide residence. She neither rents nor holds a mortgage or ownership interest in any real property. Her car, for which she pays the Town of Monroe for taxes, is registered and garaged at the property. She maintains a bedroom and stores her personal items at the property. Her driver’s license is registered at the property address. She receives all her mail there. She eats and cooks as well as entertains friends there. She helps her take care of her parents at the property, including but not limited to participating in the upkeep of the property.

6. In support the Respondent submitted recent copies of her driver's license, vehicle registration, vehicle insurance, vehicle tax bills from the Monroe Tax Collector, repair bills for the property in her name as well as a copy of a medical bill—all of which list the registered address in Monroe.
7. Turning to the question of the Respondent's eligibility as a voter in Monroe, an elector is eligible to vote in a particular town only if such voter is a bona fide resident of such town. General Statutes § 9-12, provides in pertinent part:

(a) Each citizen of the United States who has attained the age of eighteen years, and who is a bona fide resident of the town to which the citizen applies for admission as an elector shall, on approval by the registrars of voters or town clerk of the town of residence of such citizen, as prescribed by law, be an elector, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section. . . . (Emphasis added.)[Emphasis added.]

8. General Statutes § 9-172, provides in pertinent part:

At any regular or special state election any person may vote who was registered on the last-completed revised registry list of the town in which he offers to vote, and he shall vote in the district in which he was so registered; provided those persons may vote whose names are restored to the list under the provisions of section 9-42 or whose names are added on the last weekday before a regular election under the provisions of section 9-17. Each person so registered shall be permitted to vote if he is a bona fide resident of the town and political subdivision holding the election and has not lost his right by conviction of a disfranchising crime. Any person offering so to vote and being challenged as to his identity or residence shall, before he votes, prove his identity with the person on whose name he offers to vote or his bona fide residence in the town and political subdivision holding the election, as the case may be, by the testimony, under oath, of at least one other elector or by such other evidence as is acceptable to the moderator.
[Emphasis added.]

9. If a registered voter's name appears on the inactive list, such voter may be restored to active status and cast a ballot if such voter affirms that s/he is a bona fide resident of the address to which such voter seeks restoration. General Statutes § 9-42 reads, in pertinent part:

(c) The registrars of voters shall cause the inactive registry list compiled under section 9-35 to be completed and printed and deposited in the town clerk's office and shall provide a sufficient number of copies for use in the

polling place on election day. If on election day the name of an elector appears on such inactive registry list, including the name of an elector who has not responded to a confirmation of voting residence notice under subsection (e) of section 9-35 and has not voted in two consecutive federal elections, such name shall be added to the active registry list upon written affirmation signed by the elector, under penalties of false statement, before an election official at the polling place, that *such elector is still a bona fide resident of such town*, and upon the consent of both registrars or assistant registrars, as the case may be, in the polls.

(d) The name of no elector shall be added to the active registry list under the provisions of this section, unless his name or some name intended for his name was on the active registry list for at least one of the four years previous or on one of the preliminary active registry lists for the year in which the registrars are in session. [Emphasis added.]

10. Any person who votes in any election when not qualified to do so, faces both civil and criminal liability. General Statutes § 9-7b, provides in pertinent part:

(a) The State Elections Enforcement Commission shall have the following duties and powers:

...

(2) To levy a civil penalty not to exceed . . . (C) two thousand dollars per offense against any person the commission finds to have (i) improperly voted in any election, primary or referendum, and (ii) not been legally qualified to vote in such election, primary or referendum, . . . [Emphasis added.]

11. General Statutes § 9-358, provides in pertinent part:

Any person who, upon oath or affirmation, legally administered, wilfully and corruptly testifies or affirms, before any registrar of voters, any moderator of any election, primary or referendum, any board for admission of electors or the State Elections Enforcement Commission, falsely, to any material fact concerning the identity, age, residence or other qualifications of any person whose right to be registered or admitted as an elector or to vote at any election, primary or referendum is being passed upon and decided, shall be guilty of a class D felony and shall be disfranchised. [Emphasis added.]

12. General Statutes § 9-360, provides in pertinent part:

Any person not legally qualified who fraudulently votes in any town meeting, primary, election or referendum in which the person is not qualified to vote, and any legally qualified person who, at such meeting, primary, election or referendum, fraudulently votes more than once at the same meeting, primary, election or referendum, shall be fined not less than three hundred dollars or more than five hundred dollars and shall be imprisoned not less than one year or more than two years and shall be disfranchised. Any person who votes or attempts to vote at any election, primary, referendum or town meeting by assuming the name of another legally qualified person shall be guilty of a class D felony and shall be disfranchised. [Emphasis added.]

13. In order to establish liability in the present case, Respondent must not have been qualified to vote in Monroe on November 2, 2010. As noted above, General Statutes § 9-12 sets forth elector qualifications. In the present case, no one contests that the Respondent was a citizen of the United States and had attained the age of eighteen years at the time she restored her registration and voted. As such, the initial question to answer here is whether Respondent was a “bona fide resident” of Monroe at the time.
14. According to the Commission, an individual’s bona fide residence is the place where that individual maintains a true, fixed, and principal home to which he or she, whenever transiently relocated, has a genuine intent to return. *See, e.g., Complaint of Gary Amato, North Haven*, File No. 2009-158 (2010); *Complaint of Cicero Booker, Waterbury*, File No. 2007-157. In other words, “bona fide residence” is generally synonymous with domicile. *Id.*; *cf. Hackett v. The City of New Haven*, 103 Conn. 157 (1925). The Commission has concluded, however, that “[t]he traditional rigid notion of ‘domicile’ has . . . given way somewhat but only to the extent that it has become an impractical standard for the purposes of determining voting residence (i.e., with respect to college students, the homeless, and individuals with multiple dwellings).” (Emphasis added.) *Complaint of James Cropsey, Tilton, New Hampshire*, File No. 2008-047 (Emphasis added.). *See also Wit v. Berman*, 306 F.3d 1256, 1262 (2d Cir. 2002) (stating that under certain circumstances the domicile rule for voting residency can give rise to administrative difficulties which has led to a pragmatic application of that rule in New York); *Sims v. Vernon*, Superior Court, Fairfield County, No. 168024 (Dec. 22, 1977) (concluding that an absentee ballot of an individual should be counted as that individual was a bona fide resident of the town in which the ballot was cast.); *Farley v. Louzitis*, Superior Court, New London County, No. 41032 (Oct. 4, 1972) (considering issue of voter residency with respect to college students and stating that “a student, and a nonstudent as well, who satisfies the . . . residence requirement, may vote where he resides, without regard to the duration of his anticipated stay or the existence of another residence elsewhere. It is for him alone to say whether his voting interests at the residence he selects exceed his voting interests elsewhere.”).

15. The Commission has previously concluded that “[a]n individual does not, therefore, have to intend to remain at a residence for an indefinite period for that residence to qualify as that individual’s bona fide residence. *Complaint of James Cropsey, Tilton, New Hampshire*, File No. 2008-047. Rather, the individual only has to possess a present intention to remain at that residence. *Id*; see also *Maksym v. Board of Election Com’rs of City of Chicago*, Illinois Supreme Court, Docket No. 111773 (January 27, 2011), 2011 WL 242421 at *8 (“[O]nce residency is established, the test is no longer physical presence but rather abandonment. Indeed, once a person has established residence, he or she can be physically absent from that residence for months or even years without having abandoned it. . . .”)
16. Thus, the initial issue in the present matter are whether 1) the Respondent truly resided at the home in Monroe when she voted in that town on November 2, 2010 and, if so, 2) whether she had legitimate, significant, and continuing attachments to that home.
17. As with any bona fide residence inquiry, the answers to those questions turn entirely on the specific facts of this case.
18. Here, the Respondent maintains that she was a bona fide resident of the town of Monroe at all times relevant to the instant complaint. The Respondent considered the home her primary residence and treated it accordingly. Evidence was submitted that the Monroe property was in fact her primary residence. She spent a significant portion of her time at the Monroe residence and maintained significant personal attachments to the property.
19. Accordingly, the Commission concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support a claim that the Respondent was not a bona fide resident of the Town of Monroe at the time that she presented herself to vote on November 2, 2010.

ORDER

The following Order is recommended on the basis of the aforementioned findings:

That the matter be dismissed.

Adopted this 16th day of February, 2011 at Hartford, Connecticut.



Stephen F. Cashman, Chairperson
By Order of the Commission