



Testimony on House Joint Resolution No. 58 (HJ 58) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting; and House Joint Resolution No. 59 (HJ 59) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit Early Voting.

Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly's Government Administration and Elections Committee

Submitted by Ingrid Alvarez, Vice President for Policy and Strategic Engagement, Hispanic Federation

February 22, 2021

Co-Chairs Flexer, Fox, Vice-Chairs Haskell, Thomas, Ranking Members and distinguished Members of the Committee, my name is Ingrid Alvarez and I am the Vice President for Policy and Strategic Engagement at Hispanic Federation (HF) and a registered voter who was able to vote safely and securely by no-excuse absentee ballot in 2020. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in full support of *House Joint Resolution 58 (HJ 58): Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting and House Joint Resolution No. 59 (HJ 59) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit Early Voting.*

The mission of Hispanic Federation is to empower and advance the Hispanic community. In Connecticut, HF represents fifteen Latino-led grassroots organizations that are the mainstay of community life and through the collective strength of our members, Hispanic Federation informs and educates policymakers on issues that are important to Connecticut's more than 540,000 Latinos.

Over the past two decades, Connecticut has undergone a transformational demographic shift making every community and geographic region in our state more diverse. Our organization's nonpartisan civic engagement work reflects this diversity in the holistic and grassroots approach we execute to engage individuals and diverse communities. Hispanic Federation's community investments and capacity building play an active role in protecting and ensuring the voting rights of all of our state's registered voters and specifically, we are committed to helping minimize very real systemic and structural barriers that create negative experiences and hardship for Connecticut's Rising American Electorate's (RAE) to exercise their right to vote. Connecticut's RAE is comprised of Latinos, people of color, new voter registrants, mid-to low-income households, women, single mothers and low to mid propensity voters that are historically underrepresented, face unique barriers to vote and become disenfranchised.

To highlight only a few of the voter access systemic barriers Connecticut RAE's face:

1. Latinos and other Limited English Proficient (LEP) eligible voters in the state face shortages of trained bilingual poll workers to assist them at the polls.
2. Connecticut holds no specific law requiring employers to give an individual time off from work to vote in Election Day. This greatly impacts the ability of low-moderate income working voters, especially individuals that work scheduled shifts or hourly wage earners that stand to lose paid time, to participate in elections.
3. RAE voters in large urban centers like Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport experience longer lines and wait times in comparison to other cities/towns and higher incidents of ballot

shortages, machine malfunctions or other election systems irregularities that threaten a voter's ability to cast a ballot.

4. Connecticut's RAE also experience higher rates of being carless and face limited access to affordable and reliable transportation to meet their critical daily needs like going to work, school and getting to a designated polling site.

To share our own experience in Connecticut's 2020 elections; Hispanic Federation joined a statewide coalition of other people of color led and serving nonprofit organizations targeting the state's RAE in all of the eight counties (Fairfield, Hartford, New Haven, Litchfield, New London, Tolland, Middlesex, Windham Counties) in the state. We launched a Get Out the Vote nonpartisan campaign and ran straight through the closing of the polls on election night and mobilized more than 100,000 registered voters in all of the forms made available to voting residents: In-person, same-day voter registration and voting, no-excuse absentee ballot with accessible ballot boxes. In the most unprecedented year of our lives, a record 1.86 million Connecticut residents voted in the November 3rd, 2020 election—a turnout of nearly 80% of registered voters despite concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.

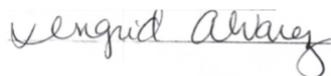
This historic voter turnout for Connecticut leaves no doubt that Connecticut must enact vote by no-excuse absentee ballot and early voting as permanent options for citizens to fully engage and participate in our democracy. It is a validating indicator to this Committee's leadership that the residents of our state have spoken through their collective actions this past November and continue to send the clear message that maximizing access for all to equitably participate in our elections is equally as significant as our responsibility to maintain the integrity and validity of our systems.

There is robust evidence on the positive impact on voter satisfaction and increased voter turn-out outcome the state experienced due to the temporary expanded forms of voter participation this past November. Polling data released by Secretary of the State Denise Merrill. demonstrates overwhelming bipartisan support for making both early voting and voting by no-excuse absentee ballot permanent options for Connecticut voters. The polling data indicates that 79% of Connecticut registered voters are in favor of allowing all voters to vote by No-Excuse Absentee ballots, 79% of voters also support early voting in the state, and 77% of voters support AVR.

Today, we ask you to uphold your duty to honor the voices and shared experiences of our state's residents and create the necessary pathways to move forward the critical systems change for election modernization set forth in HJ 58 and HJ 59. We urge you to specifically act on the proposed resolutions amending the Constitution of the State of Connecticut to permit no excuse absentee balloting and explicitly permit in person early voting.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Vice President for Policy and Strategic Engagement