



State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing
February 22, 2021

CHRO Testimony Regarding:

H.J. 58 Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment to Allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting
H.J. 59 Resolution Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.J. 58 and H.J. 59.

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities is the state's civil rights agency. Our mission includes establishing equal opportunity and justice for all persons within the state. With that mission in mind, we strongly support House Joint Resolution No. 58 and House Joint Resolution No. 59 which would allow no-excuse absentee voting and allow early voting. We encourage the passage of any legislation or resolution that promote inclusivity of all people being able to access the ballot box. Unfortunately, many of Connecticut's voting laws are outdated and overly restrictive, disproportionately affecting Black, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian voters. Other groups such as disabled people, seniors and young people are also adversely affected due to accessibility issues. For example, we are one of only a handful of states that does not allow early voting. We do not count absentee ballots that arrive post-election date despite the postmark. Voter identification laws, like those in Connecticut and in many other states across the country, disproportionately affect people of color and low-income people.

We were encouraged that no-excuse absentee ballots were allowed temporarily during the pandemic and support this as a permanent change. A higher percentage of Connecticut voters cast ballots in the 2020 election than in 2016. This was likely, at least in part, due to the ease of casting those votes by mail or in available drop off boxes. According to the Secretary of the State's office, voter turnout in Connecticut's largest cities in 2020 was 67.15% in 2020 as compared to 62.2% in 2016. Mail-in voting and early voting are important to increasing access and participation for seniors, people with disabilities, students, frequent business travelers, and single parents who may not have time in a 14-hour period on one day of the year to spend time waiting on a line to vote. We would also encourage expanding the language to eliminate the state's strict identification requirements and that would count all ballots that are postmarked by Election Day. We must as a state eliminate barriers to voting so that all may have a voice, rather than the select few who are privileged.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on these two important resolutions.