

To the esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, I'm Rhonda Caldwell, the Lead Organizer of Hamden Action Now of the Town of Hamden and a registered voter in the Town of Hamden demanding equity to the black and brown committee. I am writing in support of the following legislation:

HJ-58 A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit
No - Excuse Absentee Voting

HJ-59 A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit
Early Voting

The State of Connecticut is one of the most voter suppressed in the nation. According to the Secretary of State, in the 2020 Presidential Election, out of the 2,330,122 Connecticut citizens who were eligible to vote, only 79.65% actually participated at the polls or mailed in their ballots. In fact this was up slightly from 76.94% in 2016. Everyone in America, whether you were a Democrat or Republican, or even unaffiliated with a party, were fully aware of the stakes in the 2020 presidential election. Our communities were in the middle of a pandemic and an economic crisis the likes we haven't see in a hundred years, yet 20.35% of CT registered voters, still did not cast their vote, that's an astounding 474,203 eligible voters DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN OUR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, and 502,235 eligible registered voters not voting in the 2016 election. In a "blue state" like Connecticut which is a state that proclaims to be a banner example of Democratic values, which voter inclusion and expanding the tent of voters is a central pillar of the Democratic Party platform, it's an absolute travesty that a half a million voters did not participate in our elections process.

Many of these nearly a half a million CT voters, who did not participate in these past two presidential elections, stayed home for various reasons that everyone in the Connecticut General Assembly is well aware of including but not limited to, long lines at various polling stations around the state including in bad weather. Additionally, the times in which the polls open, from 6:00 am to 8:00 p.m., only making the polls available on election Tuesday, during peak working hours for members of the black and brown community. Polls throughout CT are not staffed with bi-lingual workers which makes asking questions or getting voting assistance or getting same day registration information, makes voting for them nearly impossible. Lastly, our current process completely disenfranchises disabled CT voters or those who were positive with COVID-19 who were just not able to physically make it out to the polls and do not have anyone to assist them in submitting their ballot. As a side note, it is very suppressive that an

accommodation of using local police departments being by the Secretary of State's office to pick up ballots from households with disabled persons who could not physically be able to get their ballots to their polling station. In my 34 years that I have been registered to vote here in CT, I have always had to make arrangements at work to either leave early or come in late to make time for me to stand in line to vote or more recently, having to find childcare while I go to the polls so that I do not have to bring my small child to the polls, since the wait is so unpredictable. It was a complete relief to not have to wait in any lines during the 2020 election period, as I received an application and a paid envelope in the mail at the beginning of October. Shortly after mailing in my application, I received my ballot in the mail and quickly filled it out and dropped it off to the box at my town hall. My ballot was registered as received online on October 7th! It was unreal after 34 years, I didn't have to take time off from work or make any sort of arrangements to head to the polls, especially in the middle of the pandemic.

43 states in the union offer in person early voting options, including 6 states with all mail elections, making it unnecessary for them to appear physically at a polling station, entirely. Connecticut lags behind most of the union. Many CT voters work 2 or even 3 jobs to survive in this very wealthy State. They need more than just one day to cast their vote, Nearly 80% of CT voters support early voting and in 2020, nearly 650,000 voters voted by absentee ballot in the 2020 general election, which means, like me, they voted around their own schedules, allowing for CT's record breaking 80% voter turnout in 2020 during this historic pandemic.

This choice is clear in this legislation, choosing democracy over voter suppression and continuing this overdue measure to increase the number of eligible voters who can participate in our election process. Black and brown voices must be heard in the voting booth and 80% voter participation is a good start with these additional voting measures, HJ-58 and HJ59, and yet we still have a long way to go in CT.

Thank you.

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