

February 22, 2021

Dear Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

First and foremost, thank you for your leadership on [House Joint Resolution No. 58 \(HJ 58\)](#) and [House Joint Resolution No. 59 \(HJ 59\)](#). I strongly support these bills because they will strengthen democracy by providing a legislative pathway to expand our voting rights.

I am a member of the Bridgeport Safe Vote Coalition, a registered voter residing in Bridgeport, CT. I ran for state and local office, elected to the Bridgeport City Council and Bridgeport's Democratic Town Committee. I have first-hand knowledge of absentee ballot abuse and its chilling effects on both voter turnout AND recruitment of strong candidates.

By limiting in-person voting to Election Day and by restricting eligibility to vote early by mail-in absentee ballot, our State is engaged in a system of voter suppression that ultimately disenfranchises all of us. However, these restrictions especially affect Connecticut's low-income, working-class citizens (targeting our black and brown communities, those working multiple jobs, those who rely on public transportation) while creating significant burdens on our disabled, home-bound, and elderly voters. In order to create an inclusive democracy, we need real, structural, 21<sup>st</sup> century reform.

For the voters of Bridgeport, the amendments proposed in HJ 58 and 59 would revolutionize our local elections. For generations, it has been an open secret that Bridgeport voters suffer under absentee ballot fraud and abuse. Political operatives abuse the absentee ballot process by targeting and manipulating our youth, elderly, disabled, low-income, and Spanish-speaking voters, all for the purpose of controlling the outcome of our local elections. Bridgeporters know the game is rigged which drives down our voter participation and civic engagement. From 2015 to 2019, Bridgeport saw a 23% decrease in voter participation in local elections. And when asked to run, most qualified citizens answer "No." To witness the efforts of hard work, fundraising, and knocking on doors nullified by unchecked manipulation of the vote is an affront to all.

Passing these two resolutions, Connecticut voters can decide if to amend our Constitution, thus enfranchising tens of thousands of Bridgeport voters and others to vote in their own manner and timeline. Equally important and equally far ranging, these resolutions would dilute the power of abusers to target and manipulate our election results. As evidenced in the 2020 Presidential election--thanks to the expanded access of absentee voting--Bridgeport far surpassed Connecticut's other large cities with a record 72% turnout! Our voters are engaged and motivated! We just need to create that environment of trust and access for full enfranchisement and free and fair elections. \_

Voters spoken with enjoyed using an absentee ballot from the safety of their homes and the convenience of the ballot drop boxes. According to Common Cause, 73% of all Connecticut voters support giving all voters the option to vote using an absentee ballot without an excuse, and nearly 80% of Connecticut voters support early voting.

I know you believe strongly in democracy, voting rights, and fair elections. With your good help, the voices of Connecticut voters to strengthen democracy and expand our voting rights will be heard.

Very truly,  
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P.S. With this email, **attached** is Bridgeport's absentee ballot tracking report dated 2/22/18. Myself and 8 others formed a Challenge Slate for a Bridgeport Democratic Town Committee Primary for our local DTC district. This was an off-year election limited to just our small, local Democratic district. The election was not city wide. You will see more than 800 names representing absentee ballot requests. By March 6<sup>th</sup>, the date of the primary, there were more than 1100! Whole streets were listed, etc. I was the only one of the 9 to win. We won in our precinct, but the losses came in the precinct where absentee ballots almost outnumbered the in-person votes. This abuse breaks people's hearts and hope.