

Thank you, Sen. Flexor, Rep. Fox, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, for allowing me to testify:

My name is Faith Ham and I live in Cheshire. I was born and raised in Connecticut, and I vote. I ask you to vote no on HJ 58 and HJ 59.

Every legal ballot cast in Connecticut is the purest expression of the will of the state's citizenry, which renders voting the most sacred right granted under the state constitution. The Secretary of the State of Connecticut and municipal registrars are charged with protecting this right and ensuring its integrity so that each citizen who casts a vote is assured that it will count and his or her sentiments about the direction of their town, state, and country are properly registered. Public officials must protect the voice of the citizenry as expressed in its vote.

These resolutions resolve to amend the state constitution to allow for no excuse absentee balloting and early voting. I've listened to much of the testimony today. It's clear we all agree ensure that every citizen who wants to vote should be given the opportunity to do so. I don't oppose either absentee balloting or early voting. However, I oppose any initiative opens the door to mistakes, irregularities, or opportunities for fraudulent voting that will disenfranchise legal voters in this state.

For 13 years, my family and I lived for 13 years in in San Jose. California is a "vote by mail" state. Ballots appeared in our boxes four weeks before an election. We could fill them out and mail them into the county registrar, submit completed ballots to the precinct on Election Day, or relinquish them when we voted in person. The te system made it easier to vote, but it also left ballots untended in mailboxes, frequently those of unoccupied houses. My daughter worked the polls and told of people submitting their completed ballots and then voting in person, people voting out of precinct, or adult children voting for their parents. Whether mistakes, irregularities, or outright fraud, these incidents voided the vote of someone else who followed rules. Perhaps it wasn't enough to throw an election, but it's still wrong, legally and ethically.

This past election, I worked on a local campaign. Relying official town voter rolls, I'd address envelope to single family residences with as many as four different sir names listed as occupants. \Thousands of pieces of literature were mail. Far fewer than those thousands were returned. These were the same rolls used to blanket the state with absentee ballot applications. In a perfect world, every undelivered application would be returned to the registrar's office. I fear Secretary Merrill's return rate on

absentee applications was as abysmal as our candidate's. A piece of misdirected campaign literature is of little threat to our republic. Not so a misdirected absentee ballot application. It creates an opportunity for fraud. We know "Irregularities" exist with absentee ballots. Our state Supreme Court acknowledged them in *Beth Lazar et. al. v. Joseph Ganim et. al. in 2019*. Knowing this, why do our Secretary of State and lawmakers insist on creating even more opportunity for these problems and feed doubts about the integrity of our elections.

Voting is our most cherished right. On that we all agree. As Rep. Thomas has pointed out repeatedly the system will never be flawless. But that doesn't mean we don't strive to make it as clean as possible. Citizens and organizations across the state for years have been sounding the alarm about bloated voter rolls and lax verification procedures for absentee ballots. Little or nothing has been done to correct these problems. Using returned absentee ballot applications to purge rolls offers little comfort. And I'm sorry Ms. Merrill, but the threat of jail time is about as ineffective a deterrent to someone intent on committing voter fraud as it is to a thief. The only way to stop either is to institute safeguards, and in Connecticut these have been slow in coming. If proponents of these measures persist, work with those calling for election reform. In the words of Rep. Smith, walk and chew gum at the same time.

Respectfully submitted,
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