

**Supplemental Testimony of
Alex J. Harris
in SUPPORT of
HJ 58 for Absentee Voting & HJ 59 for Early Voting
22 February 2021**

I am Alex Harris and I live in Ridgefield, CT. Thank you for this opportunity. I urge the General Assembly to enact HJ 58 and HJ 59 permitting voters to amend the state constitution.

Since our national Constitution came into force in 1789, the United States has aspired, struggled, and repeatedly paid blood to become and remain a free, rights-based, participatory democratic republic. It is our greatest, highest, most virtuous civic ideal and moral imperative. For too much of our history, however, it has been more aspiration than reality. Our progress through history to more fully “form a more perfect union” has by and large been driven by the expansion of suffrage rights.

The right to vote in the United States was initially guaranteed solely to land-owning, white, Protestant men, with several state constitutions specifically prohibiting the vote to non-white, non-male, non-land-owning, non-protestants. In subsequent decades, landownership and religious requirements were eliminated, but race and gender restrictions remained on the books or effectively enforced for centuries after.

A key lesson of United States history, indeed ALL of human history, is that UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE is the sole, long-term sustainable guarantee of a rights-based, participatory democratic republic. The human rights of historically deprived or repressed peoples have been secured and expanded ONLY in lockstep with the expansion of universal suffrage. And universal suffrage REQUIRES universal access.

Unfortunately, the history of the United States has been one of repeated cycles of glacially slow removal of obstacles to suffrage and voter access followed by rapid, cascading, cumulative new restrictions. The Civil War and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were followed by 80 years of increasingly apartheid-like restrictions that made it virtually impossible for people of color to vote across much of the United States. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and implementation over the next decade rolled back those post-Reconstruction restrictions, but earnest backsliding quickly followed. The backsliding reached its crescendo in the Supreme Court’s Shelby County v. Holder decision which gutted the most effective and necessary aspects of the Voting Rights Act and triggered the enactment of draconian new restrictions within hours of that decision.

The forces seeking to restrict Universal Suffrage and Universal Access are NOT retreating, but rather are accelerating. In the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election which saw the highest participation in US history and the highest rate of absentee/mail-in and early voting, the Secretaries of State in EVERY state (a majority of whom are Republicans) certified as true, secure, and materially free from fraud, and which the US Department of Justice, the FBI, and all the US intelligence agencies certified as the most secure in history, bills have been introduced

in dozens of states to impose new, more draconian restrictions on voting access. Such restrictive bills won't make our elections more true, secure, or less susceptible to fraud, but rather will make voting harder and reduce participation by eliminating early voting, mail-in voting, and other voting access enhancements that have been operated successfully and safely for decades in those states.

Connecticut MUST stand in opposition to these backsliding efforts, Connecticut must adopt and implement comprehensive early voting, mail-in voting, and any other proven, effective, secure, and successful voting access enhancements.

Objections to these amendments are red herrings. Most objections amount to claims that Connecticut cannot implement the proven, safe, and secure voting mechanisms that other states have successfully operated for decades. Claiming that a thing is impossible when in fact that very thing has uniformly functioned successfully among our sister states is pure sophistry. Such objections must be disregarded as a matter of basic logic and reason.

Additionally, the demand that implementing legislation be composed BEFORE the proposed constitutional amendments go before voters is a procedural smokescreen knitted from whole cloth and wholly counter to history, precedent, and law. By definition, each voter-approved constitutional amendment, upon becoming effective, comprehensively authorizes and constrains all subsequent action by the legislature, executive, and courts. The legislature is not permitted to take action in anticipation of potential future constitutional requirements, nor may this legislative session bind any future legislature. Demands that implementing legislation be composed BEFORE voters amend the constitution is simply a transparent effort to create new and extreme obstacles that have no valid or rational basis or purpose.

Finally, the objections based on the various unsupported claims of widespread, undetected, uncorrected, and outcome-impacting voter fraud have been thoroughly and repeatedly debunked nationally and across the states. As such, they should be given no weight. As uniformly demonstrated by the decades-long experiences of our sister states, expanded early voting and no-excuse absentee/mail-in voting will have no materially deleterious impact on the security and integrity of our elections. Limited/constrained access to voting rights is by far the more widespread, material, and outcome-impacting danger.

For all these reasons the legislature should pass these bills and send the amendments to the voters for their consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
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