

Hello Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I am the Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now Votes and a resident of Bridgeport, CT. 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 strengthen our democracy and expand our voting rights. By limiting in-person voting to election day and by placing restrictions on who is eligible to vote early by mail using an absentee ballot, our state is engaged in a system of voter suppression.

These restrictions disenfranchise Connecticut's low-income, working-class citizens (targeting our black and brown communities) while creating significant burdens on our disabled, home-bound, and elderly voters. In order to create an inclusive, multiracial democracy in this state, we need real, structural change.

For the voters of Bridgeport, the amendments proposed in HJ 58 and 59 would revolutionize our local elections. For generations, it's been an open secret that Bridgeport voters suffer under absentee ballot fraud and abuse. Political operatives abuse the absentee ballot process by targeting, lying to, and manipulating our youth, elderly, disabled, low-income, and Spanish-speaking residents, all for the purpose of controlling the outcome of our local elections.

The closed nature of Connecticut elections - and the burdens placed on voters to exercise our right to vote - means local elections in our state are easily manipulated when political actors are highly motivated.

When we sued city officials and the Ganim campaign after Bridgeport's 2019 mayoral primary, evidence presented at the 2019 trial "Lazar v. Ganim" proved that political operatives in Bridgeport are paid to solely distribute AB applications - which is against state law; that they lie to voters about the laws governing who is qualified to use an AB - against state law; that they forged voters signatures and applications - against state law; that they took voters ballots from them - against state law; and that our Town Clerk used antiquated methods of tracking ABs, which caused them to mail out duplicate ballots, flooding the system.

This behavior in Bridgeport is not new - the lawsuit just brought it into the light. Bridgeporters have known for decades the game is rigged, which drives our voter participation and civic engagement down. From 2015 to 2019, Bridgeport saw a 23% decrease in voter participation in our local elections.

By passing these two resolutions, we create the opportunity to enfranchise tens of thousands of Bridgeport voters to vote on their own accord and their own timeline - and diluting the power of abusers to target and manipulate our election results. In fact, 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! Bridgeport voters we spoke with enjoyed using an

absentee ballot from the safety of their home and the convenience of the ballot drop boxes. Our voters are educated and motivated! We just need to create the right environment for full enfranchisement and free and fair elections.

I know you all believe strongly in democracy, voting rights, and fair elections. It's time to strengthen our democracy and expand voting rights by letting the voters of Connecticut decide.