



Re: Black and Brown United In Action's Testimony for H.J. No. 58 and H.J. No. 59

Dear Government Administration and Elections Committee,

Black and Brown United In Action is a grassroots organization located in New Haven, CT and supports H.J No. 58 and H.J. No. 59.

Black and Brown United In Action recognizes that Connecticut's constitution and statutes are restrictive in terms of when elections can be held and the rules around them, Connecticut residents are currently unable to take advantage of early voting that offers voters ample opportunities to participate in an election. Today, 43 states and the District of Columbia offer early in-person voting as an option. Delaware has enacted early voting, but it will not be in place until 2022. Six states do not offer pre-Election Day in-person voting options: Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, and South Carolina.

On Friday, July 17, 2020, Alabama's Secretary of State announced that no-excuse absentee voting would continue through the November 3, 2020, elections. The announcement was a massive win in the fight for accessible voting amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretary's decision came after the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a July 6, 2020, amended complaint in *People First of Alabama v. Merrill*, which alleged that the lack of no-excuse absentee voting endangered the lives of high-risk voters in violation of the U.S. Constitution and federal civil rights laws.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Governor Lamont, Secretary of the State Denise Merrill, and the Connecticut legislature acted quickly to implement temporary voting reforms to ensure that Connecticut residents could safely exercise their right to vote. Those measures included expanded absentee ballot voting, mailing absentee ballot applications to registered voters, and the installation of secure drop-boxes. Despite these temporary reforms, Connecticut still lags behind states across the country on issues of voter access. Enacting early voting, as well as expanding absentee ballot voting, requires a constitutional amendment. In October 2020, the CT Legislature passed a one-time COVID-19 exception to the restrictive absentee ballot rules by

35-1 in the Senate and 139-5 in the House. About 35% of votes cast in the November 2020 election were by absentee ballot.

We contend that no excuse absentee voting will offer expansion of opportunities for registered voters to exercise their right to vote going forward and is a proactive step toward ending voting suppression. Voters schedules, illness on election day, work responsibilities and family engagements, are barriers to voter engagement, and promotes voter suppression and unresponsive of true democracy. Instead of making voting maximally convenient, Connecticut's one day only to vote makes it unnecessarily inconvenient to vote which disenfranchises a portion of voters who for various reasons are not able to vote on Election Day. This also affects the manner in which unregistered voters and young people interpret democracy as a continual violation of a civil right, such as the right to vote increases voter suppression and also tarnishes what voting should be, which is a platform of democracy for the community to be involved in opportunity and improvement through engagement in policy and decision making.

Today, a broad coalition of good government groups, faith leaders, civil rights organizations and labor leaders from across Connecticut called on legislative leaders to support a historic and ambitious voting rights agenda in the 2021 legislative session, including expanded absentee ballot rights, early voting, Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), voting rights for people on parole and more. This call to action has support black and brown people and from a coalition which consists of over 80 groups across Connecticut including the League of Women Voters of Connecticut, Moral Monday CT, CT Black Women, Hamden Action Now, Generation Change CT, Black and Brown United In Action, Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, SEIU, the ACLU of Connecticut and Common Cause CT.

Lastly, H.J. No. 58 and H.J. No. 59 are the first steps toward making voting a greater priority through early voting and no excuse absentee voting. A vote in favor of these resolutions moves the process forward, it is a move toward ending voter suppression and empowers true democracy.

Sincerely,

Catherine John  
Lead Organizer  
Black and Brown United in Action