

February 22, 2021

**Testimony
in
Support
of
Statewide Constitutional Amendment
to
Allow
No-Excuse Absentee Voting and Early Voting**

**To:
Government Administration & Elections Committee
Connecticut State Capitol
300 Capitol Ave, Suite 2200
Hartford, CT 06106**

**By:
Kyle Knickerbocker
of
Essex, CT**

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Flexer and Rep. Fox, and Distinguished Members of the GAE Committee,

My name is Kyle Knickerbocker of Essex, Connecticut, one of four towns represented in the 36th house district by State Representative Christine Palm, who I'm proud to point out, is a member of this important committee.

In addition to being a United States Merchant Marine, and a 29 year resident of Connecticut, I come before you as a volunteer activist with Democratic Women in Action, to **write in enthusiastic support of No- Excuse Absentee Voting (HJ 58) and Early Voting (HJ 59)** to make voting more accessible to all eligible voters.

While this past Presidential Election was considered not only to be "the most secure Election in American History" by the Department of Homeland Security's Cyber Infrastructure Agency, it also had the highest voter turnout in 120 years for mail-in voting ever according to the US Elections Project.

It still does not change the fact that Connecticut still has some of this nation's most restrictive regulations on voters' use of absentee ballots.

However, there is good news.

The recent election shows that, not only was there 80% turnout in Connecticut by use of absentee ballot, but a poll done on Jan 28th of this year by the Office of the Secretary State of Connecticut shows Connecticut Voters showing broad, bipartisan support for

early Voting; expanding access to absentee ballots; common-sense voting reforms well over 70% in each category.

I believe it's safe to say, now is an opportunity to change that, and make our state a model for the remaining 1/3 of states in the nation who still have restricted regulations on absentee voting, specifically not allowing qualified voters to vote by absentee without offering an excuse.

So, just as I did when I was in support of a constitutional amendment in 2007-2008 to allow 17-year-olds to vote on Primary Day here in Connecticut (as long as they turned 18 by Election Day - an act alone of which accounted for the largest group of new voters in 2008 - a total of about 157,000 registered voters.) I argue with passion for doing with away with these restrictions on the issue or early & no-excuse balloting for the following reasons:

- **Increases accessibility:**

In 2019, *ACLU Virginia* argued that allowing no-excuse absentee/mail-in voting by mail in Virginia would increase accessibility for minority voters, voters with disabilities, those in rural communities, and more. *

- **Reduces administrative burden and cost:**

In 2019, The *Election Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association* wrote a report supporting a proposed constitutional amendment to allow no-excuse absentee/mail-in voting in New York state, saying it would reduce administrative burden and costs. **

- **When done correctly and thoroughly, reduces potential fraud and improves reliability.**

The *National Vote at Home Institute* argued that best practices exist for states using systems such as absentee/mail-in balloting and that incidents of fraud associated with systems using best practices are rare.

With that said, I wholeheartedly believe that with these reasons brought before you in support of **No- Excuse Absentee Voting (HJ 58) and Early Voting (HJ 59)**, while elections are important in their own right, who is allowed to vote, is just as important. For example, these measure will ensure:

- Voting is a democratic right generations have fought for.
- Representation remains to have a big impact in all areas of life and continues to drive change.
- Every vote counts, especially when elections are close.

As many entities say, you take care of your tools, and your tools will take care of you.

I urge you the GAE committee to vote yes, followed by urging the Connecticut Legislature to pass a joint resolution to propose a constitutional amendment by a simple majority this year.

We know that along with severe weather, long and strenuous work hours in addition to the threat COVID-19 poses for the long term, voters and citizens need to be prepared to vote safely by absentee ballot in the future.

Please, all of you, stay safe and well - we need you. Thank you for your service.

Respectfully,

Kyle Knickerbocker
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Sources:

*ACLU Virginia, "ACLU-VA Urges Lawmakers to Support No-Excuse Absentee Voting," January 16, 2019

** National Vote at Home Institute, "Policy and Research Guide," October 10, 2019

*** Slate Magazine, "Republicans Are Not Interested in Stopping Voter Fraud" September 1, 2016

