

Shannon R. Lane, LMSW, PhD
168 Miller Road, Bethany CT 06524
drshannonlane@gmail.com

Testimony in support of HJ 58, HJ 59, and SB 901 HB 6464 regarding Absentee Ballots and Early Voting.

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, ranking members Senator Sampson, Representative Mastofrancesco, and members of the GAE committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the expansion of absentee ballots and Early Voting in Connecticut and the extension of COVID-19 voting rules through spring 2021.

My name is Shannon Lane, and I am a social worker. In my collaborations with the Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work at UConn and my position as Associate Professor at Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University, I research voting rights and access. I also serve as the Deputy Registrar of Voters for the town of Bethany.

SB 901 & HB 6464

I support the extension of COVID-19 related changes to state elections implemented last year.

[In November, 665,597 Connecticut voters voted by absentee ballot, including 35% of all ballots cast and 29% of all registered voters.](#) The COVID-19 related risks to registrars, poll workers, town clerks, and voters have not changed since this committee allowed expanded access to absentee ballots last summer. I remain concerned for these workers and voters in the May 2021 municipal elections in Andover, Union, Woodbridge, and my town of Bethany; the city election in Groton; the borough elections in Bantam, Danielson, Fenwick, Jewett City, Litchfield, Newtown, Stonington, and Woodmont; and upcoming special elections. They deserve the same protections offered to all of Connecticut's voters in November 2020. Notably, [as of February 20, 16% of Connecticut's residents had received the COVID vaccine, but the majority of residents have not been vaccinated and vaccination rates are lower for Black and Latino/a residents than for White residents.](#)

In Connecticut, voting via absentee ballot is overwhelmingly safe and secure, and goes through several checks with both the town clerks and registrars of voters. In November, I worked with my Republican counterpart in Bethany to count more than 1,000 absentee ballots, and this process went smoothly and efficiently. The availability of easy access to absentee ballots also made it possible for the pollworkers and voters who choose to vote in person to feel safe on Election Day through reduced lines and ability to social distance.

Key to this process were ballot boxes available to voters 24/7 throughout the state. These boxes allowed voters to drop off their ballots themselves, without worrying about the delays in mailing

Shannon R. Lane, LMSW, PhD
168 Miller Road, Bethany CT 06524
drshannonlane@gmail.com

or risking interaction with workers in town hall. I also ask you to be sure towns use these boxes through this spring's elections.

HJ 58, HJ 59

I also support amending the state Constitution to allow for Early Voting or expanded absentee ballots.

Along with [73%](#) of Connecticut residents, I support Early Voting and increased access to absentee ballots.

To answer the most common concerns: does voting by mail lead to voter fraud? [No. It does not.](#) Does early voting lead to voter fraud? Also [no](#).

[Today, 43 states \(and DC\) have Early Voting as a standard part of their election procedures; Delaware will join this group in 2022. 34 states \(and DC\) allow residents to request absentee ballots without providing an excuse.](#) Connecticut is an outlier in providing access to voting to our residents. I frequently lead discussions on voting with social workers and students across the country and they are almost always shocked to find out neither of these options are regularly available to Connecticut voters.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.