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House Joint Resolution No. 58 (HJ 58) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting; and House Joint Resolution No. 59 (HJ 59) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit Early Voting.

My name is Molly Norris and I am the Field and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Western Connecticut Area Labor Federation and I live in New Haven. Connecticut's voting system is overdue for upgrade. I grew up and became a voter in the state of Oregon, where we vote early and we vote by mail. In Oregon my voting experience was always seamless. I never had to worry. I filled out my ballot in the comfort of my home and either mailed it back or dropped it on my own time without disrupting my productivity or work day. Because I did a job with an unpredictable schedule and long hours this ease of access was the only thing that meant I was able to develop the habit of voting at a young age and vote in 100% of the elections that occurred.

I was still living in Oregon when the pandemic hit this past spring, and my voting process for the primary in May didn't change from the original plan. The state was able to pivot easily and I was able to vote on schedule. In June, I relocated cross-country to Connecticut. Here I found I had to jump through many additional hoops to vote by mail in the general election and keep my high-risk household safe from Covid-19 – including acquiring a home printer, filing multiple forms, and hoping that radio silence meant they were received. I'm a highly organized person, and I almost didn't get it done in time.

I was shocked to find out that prior to the Pandemic the criteria for receiving an absentee ballot was strict, and that Connecticut offered no options for early voting. If I had spent my earlier voting years in Connecticut I can't imagine how many elections I would have missed, or how many I might miss moving forward if these rules aren't changed. What if someone has a restrictive job, a complicated schedule, parenting duties, limited access to transportation, or other limitations not currently accepted? Not everyone has the privilege of flexibility.

I believe voting early and voting by mail are essential to making elections accessible, equitable, and safe. Speaking of safe, in October 2020 the Oregon Legislative Fiscal Office released data that concluded the voter fraud rate in the state is about 0.00000006% over the past 19-years. There is no question that mail-in ballots are safe and secure.

This isn't about simple convenience, it's about basic access to democracy. HJ 58 and HJ 59 are two important steps forward for Connecticut. Thank you.

Molly Norris