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## Testimony of Rochelle Palache, District Director and Vice President 32BJ SEIU

February 22, 2021

### HJ 58 RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING

### HJ 59 RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING

Thank you to Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections. My name is Rochelle Palache and I am testifying on behalf 32BJ which represents over 4,500 persons in the state of Connecticut and 175,000 members up and down the East Coast.

Despite Covid-19 Connecticut was able to have a higher turnout during the 2020 general election than in the 2016 election, with an additional 185,000 voters casting a ballot.<sup>i</sup> 659,000 absentee ballots were counted.<sup>ii</sup> As measured by the voting eligible population turnout increased substantially from 64.9% to 71.5%.<sup>iii</sup> While the Covid-19 pandemic affected all of us in 2020 there are many obstacles beyond those enumerated under current Connecticut law that might prevent a diligent potential voter from exercising their right to the franchise.<sup>iv</sup> While the law provides for formal equality it does not do enough to advance equity.

Potential voters who work multiple jobs or those who work jobs with unpredictable schedules might simply not have enough time to be able to cast vote, those without the financial wherewithal to access a car might not be able to get to the voting station, those whose living in more populated urban areas might face imposing lines on election day,<sup>v</sup> and those who have a family member fall ill around election time might choose to be by their bedside. These are just a few of the countless personal circumstances or emergencies that might prevent someone from voting. Permitting no-excuse absentee voting and early voting would mean that casting a ballot would cease to be a matter of and become a matter of will.

We are not asking the legislature to experiment with completely new approaches to voting. Connecticut itself successfully implemented absentee voting in 2020 and under pressure of time and Covid-19.<sup>vi</sup> 43 states offer in person early voting options.<sup>vii</sup> We are simply asking that Connecticut cease being one of the most difficult states to vote in.<sup>viii</sup> When a higher percentage of our citizenry participates our democracy is stronger and the legitimacy of the State's laws will be more respected.

The great labor leader, Cesar Chavez, said, "We don't need perfect political systems, we need perfect participation." However, we can't have perfect participation in our state if we don't provide our voters with the opportunity to participate to the full extent possible. Please stand with us and support these constitutional amendments to expand access to the democratic process in our state. We ask that you stand with our state's working families by passing HJ 58 and HJ 59.

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<sup>i</sup> *A record number of Connecticut voters turned out on Nov. 3*, AP (Nov. 25, 2020)

<https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-connecticut-denise-merrill-elections-5597dcdaebcdf04c66d9a61cd4d80582>

<sup>ii</sup> *Id.*

<sup>iii</sup> McDonald, Michael P, *Voter Turnout Data*, UNITED STATES ELECTION PROJECT <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data> (Voting Eligible Population Total Ballots Counted )

<sup>iv</sup> Section 9-135 of the Connecticut General Laws.

<sup>v</sup> Jack Kramer, *In Connecticut, Long Lines and Problems At A Hartford Polling Place*, CT NEWS JUNKIE (Nov. 8, 2016), [https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2016/11/08/smooth\\_start\\_to\\_voting\\_in\\_tumultuous\\_year/](https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2016/11/08/smooth_start_to_voting_in_tumultuous_year/)

<sup>vi</sup> Executive Order 7QQ dated May 20, 2020. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7QQ.pdf> (permitting absentee voting if there is no widely available vaccination against Covid-19).

<sup>vii</sup> *State Laws Governing Early Voting*, NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (Oct. 22, 2020), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/early-voting-in-state-elections.aspx>

<sup>viii</sup> Matt DeRienzo, *In Connecticut, Voters Face Some of the Biggest Obstacles Outside the South*, PUBLIC INTEGRITY (Oct. 7, 2020), <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/us-polling-places/connecticut-voters-face-some-of-the-biggest-obstacles-outside-the-south/>