

February 22nd, 2021

Dear members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester. I live and vote in Glastonbury. As one who is concerned that Connecticut's voting protocols are too restrictive and deter too many people from voting, I fully support passing both HJ 58, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting; and HJ 59, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit Early Voting.

Unitarian Universalists gather our congregations around a set of seven principles. The fifth principle is: "The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." We view democracy not only as essential to a healthy, thriving, inclusive and fair society, but as sacred. Whenever the structures used to manage voting at the local, state or national level actually deter voters from going to the polls, we will feel compelled to speak up

43 states offer in person early voting options, including 6 states with all-mail elections. Connecticut lags behind most of the nation. Many low-income workers now work 2 or 3 jobs just to keep their families afloat and they need more options than just a single day to get time off for voting. Recent polling says nearly 80% of Connecticut voters support early voting.

More than 650,000 voters voted securely by absentee ballot in the 2020 CT General Election—which means they voted early on their own schedules. Connecticut's record breaking 80% voter turnout in the 2020 General Election was thanks to absentee ballot voting. Furthermore, 73% of Connecticut voters support giving all voters the option to vote by absentee ballot without needing an excuse. We should be celebrating these successes in the 2020 general elections as victories for democracy in Connecticut. And we should be doing everything we can to assure that these successes can be continued into the future.

While HJ 59 (Early Voting) only needs a 50% majority vote in favor, both the House and Senate must pass HJ 58 (No-Excuse Absentee Voting) with at least a 75% supermajority this legislative session—in which case this proposal would also appear before voters as a ballot question in the 2022 statewide election. Let's get it done this session!

The choice is clear. Please choose democracy and pass HJ 58 and HJ 59.

Thank you,

Rev. Josh Pawelek
Glastonbury, CT