



Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 22, 2021

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Common Cause in Connecticut

Chairwoman Senator Flexer, Chairman Representative Fox, Vice-chairs Senator Haskell, Representative Thomas and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire. I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. We have 1.5 million members nationwide and more than 15,000 members and activists in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut has a long history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics and election reform.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before the GAE committee on these important bills. We support the following proposals:

- [House Joint Resolution 58 \(HJ 58\) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting](#);
- [House Joint Resolution 59 \(HJ 59\) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit Early Voting](#)

Voter approval of these State Constitutional Amendments will provide Connecticut with the opportunity to enact laws to allow any eligible voter to cast a ballot before Election Day and make better use of absentee ballots.

- 43 states offer in person early voting options (including 6 states with all-mail elections, making it unnecessary for them) and the District of Columbia. Any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day. No excuse or justification is required. Passage of the Constitutional Amendment could allow Connecticut to do so as well.

- Nationwide, it is estimated that over 101 million American voters cast their ballots before Election Day in 2020 — shattering previous records. 65 million more used mail-in ballots.

Common Cause has supported this concept since 2014. We are eager to again pass it through both chambers and at the ballot. Our robust outreach and education has transformed to these socially-distant COVID-19 times but I will note that in conversations, commuters in particular are supportive (we met many people at train platforms along the metro north line), students (are universally supportive because of their unpredictable schedules and difficulties with transportation to polling places), low-income individuals (extremely supportive especially in rural areas with limited transportation and urban areas with confusing and changing polling places).

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- Nationwide, it is estimated that more than 40 million American voters cast their ballots before Election Day in 2018 — breaking previous records
- If the State Constitutional Amendments are approved by voters, state law does not change automatically. The state legislature would determine whether, when and how updated procedures, such as Early Voting, would be permitted in Connecticut.

650,000 Connecticut voters cast their ballots by absentee in the 2020 general election meaning that they chose the time and manner in which they voted. Many voted early and many in fact indicate they would be interested in voting early but in person. Many used the ballot boxes that were installed in each town, in some city/towns had more than one with many located at city/town halls.

These measures enjoy broad support from Connecticut voters across the political spectrum— 79% of voters in favor of early voting and 73% of voters in favor of absentee ballot voting. It is time for Connecticut to catch up with the rest of the nation.

We urge passage of HJ 58 and HJ 59

Common Cause in Connecticut also supports passage of:

[S.B. No. 901 \(Raised\) An Act Extending to June 30, 2021, Changes Implemented for the 2020 State Election as a Result of COVID-19](#)

[H.B. No. 6464 \(Raised\) An Act Extending to May 31, 2021, Several Changes Implemented for the 2020 State Election as a Result of COVID-19](#)

This is a challenging time for us as a state and it is with sadness that I include the numbers detailing some of the tragedy of COVID-19. According to the Hartford Courant, as of Friday 2.19.2021, the total deaths in Connecticut that are confirmed to be a result of coronavirus are 7,523. The total of confirmed cases of coronavirus are 273,101.

We are leading the nation in coronavirus vaccinations but to date we have only vaccinated 558,539 with one (1) dose of the vaccine. This is a frightening situation but we are optimistic that we can get a handle on it, that we will have an adequate supply of vaccine and address time lost for school children, ensure that families have food and safe shelter, and address the need to make sure that responses do not continue to fail people of color as we are being warned is happening by public health officials and advocates.

These proposed bills, SB 901 and HB 6464 are the minimum we, as a state, can do to make sure that voters are safe as they cast their ballots. No one should have to choose between their health and their right to vote.