

2/17/2021

Written Testimony in support of HJ-58 (expanded access to absentee ballots) and in support of HJ-59 Early Voting

Dear Members of the Committee on Government Administration and Elections:

We write in support of HJ-58 and HJ-59 calling for expanded methods for voting. Each of these measures enhances representative democracy and they are supported by non-partisan pro-democracy groups such as the League of Women Voters of Connecticut. Both HJ58 and HJ-59 will combat the structural voter suppression that exists in CT. We are one of only 7 states with neither Early Voting or No Excuse Absentee Ballot (NEAB) voting. As you know, our current laws allow voting only within specific hours of the day of the election. This serves as a form of voter suppression targeting those who have less flexible schedules, often low wage workers who are disproportionately Black and Brown voters. These election laws also disadvantage unpaid caregivers, predominantly women, who are responsible for child and elder care. Unanticipated child illness for example, can easily disrupt a plan to go to the polls to vote. Voting **SHOULD** be as easy as possible. We have just had a great experience with NEAB voting and this should be extended to all elections as soon as possible. As eligible voters at a higher risk for COVID, we took advantage of the ability to vote via absentee ballot. We also appreciated having the ballot dropbox available to us as it obviated concern about the timeliness of mail delivery. Indeed, we were correct to be concerned about mail delivery as cards sent to us in mid-December from out of state did not reach us until late January.

Some have suggested that these measures should not be advanced at the same time. Indeed, they were not advanced together in 2019, and as a result HJ-58 must be passed by a Supermajority (three-quarters) of the CT House and Senate. We believe that these measures should be advanced together. Connecticut voters have just experienced an election in which 650,000 of us used an absentee ballot to exercise our right to vote. Town Clerks and other election officials have worked out the processes. Thus calls for delay seem disingenuous and motivated by efforts to suppress the vote as articulated last year by an elected state representative who opined publicly that while voting may be a right "...we don't have to hand it to them on a silver platter." What a disgraceful attitude by anyone much less an elected representative. The process is long enough. Even after being passed by necessary proportions the CGA, the measures must come before the CT voters as a referendum measure. At the earliest that will be 2022 and if approved, voters will FINALLY have access to these voting method expansions in 2024. As noted previously, CT is one of only 7 states in the country with neither Early Voting or NEAB voting. This is not an auspicious group of which we are a member. As Secretary of State Merrill often says: CT has some of the most restrictive election laws in the country. This needs to change.

Thank you.

Joan Twiggs/Irene Scheibner
Bloomfield, CT 06002