

**Government Administration and Elections Committee**

**Monday, February 22**

**House Joint Resolution No. 58 (HJ 58): Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting - Support**

**House Joint Resolution No. 59 (HJ 59) Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Permit Early Voting - Support**

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Dr. David Walsh, I am Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Southern Connecticut State University and currently serve as President of Chapter 409, Council 400, Connecticut State Employees Association. I am testifying today to endorse in the strongest possible terms amendment to the state constitution to permit No-Excuse Absentee Voting through HJR 58 and amendment to the state constitution to permit Early Voting through support of HJR 59. I also support separate legislation to secure drop boxes for cities and towns, automatic voter registration, and creation of a secure procedure for the mailing of ballots directly to private homes. These measures to expand access to voting have broad base support within the state's population.

My advocacy for amendments to the state constitution rests on two arguments. First, voting is the most vital, even existential, process in any democracy. Every major American study of political democracy has defined the democratic state as a system of "popular sovereignty" and "majority rule" in which leaders are held accountable by a "responsible electorate". Rulers gain the right to govern by achieving a majority of the electorate, and the electoral process itself is the central political activity of the state. Parties and candidates must present their programs to voters who, through factual analysis and emotional response, decide which competitors to support. Voting is the essential entry point from which citizens assume other civic obligations and accept what some have called a "civic culture" or civic consciousness of belonging to a political system. Citizens obey the law, pay taxes, and answer calls for national service because they believe they have a role and a stake in the political system, and voting reinforces these beliefs at both a practical and symbolic level. To the contrary, political scientists have noted that in any democratic polity the marginalized and powerless segments of society are those who cannot legally vote. Such groups suffer the ultimate political discrimination and must resort to illegal and anti-system forms of political action.

Many believe that the strength of a democracy can be measured by the percentage of the adult population that actually votes, a percentage that is historically lower in America than in other democratic states. Given the facts that voting promotes responsible citizenship, political activism within the law, and a sense of obligation to one's polity, it is in the interest of all of us to support any measure that will increase the number of registered voters and make it easier for people to actually vote.

Second, for more than a decade illiberal and undemocratic groups have conducted a systematic campaign of voter suppression in much of the United States. These groups have used a variety of means, including gerrymandering and redistricting; voter roll purges of "re-identified voters"; manipulation of voting locations; strict voter identification requirements; intimidation of voter registration activists; threats of criminal prosecution for alleged voter fraud; and challenges to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Brennan Center for Justice has reported that in 2017 alone, 99 bills to limit access to the ballot box were introduced in 31 states, and currently 28 states are experiencing organized campaigns to restrict the electorate. It must be clearly understood that these tactics are the same as those employed in southern states during the Jim Crow era and seek to achieve the same goals of minority rule and deprivation of the civil rights of a large number of citizens. The stated justifications for their actions, prevention of voter fraud, administrative efficiency, and cost savings, are just as contrived and invalid as they were in the 1880s.

The antidote to these undemocratic measures is to make voting easier by accommodating the needs of contemporary voters, including citizens fearful of public gatherings during the pandemic, parents compelled to care for children who are homeschooling, the elderly who are dependent on others for transportation, and members of families who may confront changes in their work schedules. Voting should not require endangering one's health, neglect of one's children, or the "luck" of good weather and the availability of transportation. As proven in the 2020 election, early voting, voting by mail, and the other measures discussed above will increase the turnout on election day and send a strong message to the rest of the country that the people of Connecticut support a strong democracy.

I want to thank you for hearing my testimony. I ask you to support House Joint Resolution 58 and House Joint Resolution 59.

David Walsh  
Stafford Springs