

Testimony of Brittney Lynn Yancy

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

February 22, 2021

Dear Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Daniel Fox, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Brittney Yancy, and I am a registered voter in Vernon, Connecticut. I submit this testimony in support of **HJ-58: RESOLUTION PROPOSING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING** and **HJ-59: RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING**. I also submit this statement as a member of the following three organizations committed to equal voting rights: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Epsilon Omicron Omega Chapter, United State of Women Greater Hartford, and CT Black Women.

In the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing inequities and made voting even more difficult for the most vulnerable in our communities. From senior citizens to predominately Black and Latinx communities, the increased exposure to COVID-19 has increased the risk for those forced to vote in-person and discouraged many voters from exercising their fundamental right to vote.

For the 2020 elections, our Secretary of the State, Denise Merrill, worked to ensure every voter had safe and fair access to the ballot box. Connecticut's November 2020 "pandemic" elections were safe, secure, and had the highest turnout ever (nearly 80%). However, not everyone voted safely and securely in this past election. From Wisconsin to Connecticut, we witnessed states violating citizens' fundamental human right to vote through systemic barriers that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latinx voters. **No Early Voting** and **conditional Absentee Voting**, as defined in our state's constitution, are barriers, and these obstacles are part of the long history of voter suppression addressed in the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965.

However, the growing changes on the Federal level have threatened voter protections and spotlighted voter disenfranchisement brought on by COVID. Most recently, the U.S. Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision undermined two provisions of the Voting Rights Act. The two provisions impacted, Section 5—which requires certain states and local governments to obtain federal preclearance before implementing voting laws or practices; and Section 4(b)—which contains the formula to determine which jurisdictions are subject to preclearance based on their voting discrimination history. The Voting Rights Act promises to eliminate barriers—photo ID, documentary proof of citizenship, redistricting, election protection, and voter purges—but with the hostility from the previous administration and partisan interests, the VRA sits in a precarious state with no reauthorization.

At a time when the Voting Rights Act continues to be under attack, these two joint solutions represent a critical opportunity for Connecticut to confront head-on its voter suppressive systems brought on by the pandemic, and more broadly, address the extended legacy of voting discrimination in the state. While Connecticut took steps to protect voter rights in the 2020 Election, the fact remains that those were temporary provisions, and citizens are still vulnerable. According to the Brookings, Connecticut received a **C rating** in the [VOTE-BY-MAIL PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS Report \(based on data from November 3, 2020\)](#). This rating proves that Connecticut still lags behind states across the country when it comes to voter access.

This letter demands an amendment of our state's constitution that expands voter protections in the following five ways:

- 1. A constitutional amendment to allow all registered voters to vote by absentee ballot without an "excuse."**
- 2. A constitutional amendment to allow early, in-person voting. Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, and South Carolina are the only six states that do not offer pre-election day in-person voting.**
3. Legislation to implement automatic voter registration (AVR) beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies and update the online voter registration (OVR) system.
4. Legislation to restore voting rights to individuals on parole.
5. Legislation to allow for absentee ballots to be counted early, and for secure ballot boxes.

I want to stress my support for the last point because Vernon was the last town to provide a state-sanctioned ballot box. My town received its state-sanctioned secure voting box a week before the primaries, limiting citizens ability to exercise their vote safely during the pandemic. With these amendments and reforms, Connecticut can restore fairness and faith in our electoral system.

As a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the United State of Women, and CT Black Women, these organizations are dedicated to all people's full and equitable participation in our democracy. HJ-58 and HJ-59 give Connecticut the chance to close the gaps in our electoral process and restore voting protections. These bills ensure a system that can rise to the challenge while guaranteeing the most vulnerable in our state have access to our democracy.

In closing, I urge you to support H.J. 58 & H.J. 59 and expand voter protections in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Brittney Yancy

Vernon, Connecticut