

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HJ-59

RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE

Title: CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING.

Vote Date: 3/5/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/22/2021

File No.: 97

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To allow eligible voters in the state of Connecticut the option of in person early voting. The question would appear on the November 8, 2022 election ballot as "Shall the Constitution of the State be amended to permit the General Assembly to provide for early voting?".

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Denise W. Merrill, Secretary of the State: In her testimony, Secretary Merrill stated her support to allow a system of in-person Early Voting to be created. She explained that passing this bill would give voters more flexibility when casting their ballots and would allow the State of Connecticut to join the majority of states that provide this option. She stated that in 2020 more than 100 million people voted early, accounting for more than two thirds of the total votes that were cast. According to a recent poll, Secretary Merrill stated that 79% of voters in Connecticut supported Early Voting. She goes on to emphasize the effects of COVID-19 on the 2020 election and how Early Voting allowed voters to cast their ballots without having to choose between their health and ability to vote. Secretary Merrill explains that voting yes on this bill would simply remove the restrictions against Early Voting in the state Constitution and once passed additional conversations need to be had to discuss the best way to implement the reform.

Connecticut Senate Democrats, Connecticut General Assembly: The Connecticut Senate Democrats caucus gave their testimony in support of Early Voting. They stated that not all eligible voters may have the ability to vote in-person on election day and allowing Early voting would provide flexible accessibility to the residents of Connecticut. They emphasized

that Connecticut is one of only a few states that in-person early voting is not made available. Allowing Early Voting, according to the caucus, would potentially remove any hardships that voters may have in regards to getting to the polls and prevent voter disenfranchisement.

State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO): The State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities provided testimony in support of allowing Early Voting in the state of Connecticut. They explained that by allowing the opportunity to vote early in-person would promote inclusivity of all eligible voters to be able to access the ballot box. They emphasized that many of Connecticut's current voting laws are restrictive and disproportionately affect Black, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian voters. In addition, voter groups such as those with disabilities or seniors are also affected because of accessibility issues. CHRO stated that voter participation in the 2020 election was higher than in 2016, likely being, in-part, due to the option of voting early. The State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights support voting early in order to eliminate barriers to voting to give all people of Connecticut the chance to have a voice.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Ingrid Alvarez, Vice President for Policy and Strategic Engagement, Hispanic Federation: In their testimony Alvarez of the Hispanic Federation stated that they are committed to helping minimize systemic and structural barriers that create hardships for Connecticut's Rising American Electorate's (RAE), that is comprised of Latinos, people of color, new voter registrants, mid-to-low-income households, women, single mother and low to mid propensity voters that have historically been underrepresentation and face unique barriers to vote. Some of these barriers that were stated include, language barriers at the polls, conflict of time when working, longer lines in large urban centers, and limited access to affordable and reliable transportation. They stated that allowing early voting would increase voter turnout and allow for more flexibility and accessibility to many voters.

Stephen Anderson, President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001: In their testimony, Anderson stated that early voting is the norm through most of our country and Connecticut is only one of seven states that gives voters no access to voting prior to Election Day without an excuse. They explained that allowing early voting would give voters a safe, secure and effective way to cast their vote and would enhance our democracy.

Hon. Darryl Brackeen, JR., Chair, Generation Change CT: Hon. Darryl Brackeen testified that allowing early voting would build a stronger, fairer and more inclusive democracy and economy for all of Connecticut's residents. They explained that current voting restrictions negatively and disproportionately impact communities of color. They stated that there should be a set minimum of 15 days for early in-person voting with poll sites evenly distributed across community. Additionally, an electronic voting option should be offered for voters to use on their smartphones, tablets and computers.

Lori Brown, Executive Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters: Lori Brown testified that the easier it is for people to vote, the more people will be engaged in our democratic process which would in turn strengthen support for the environment. They explained that Connecticut should be expanding options available to vote to help encourage new voters, many of which are encouraged and driven by environmental issues to take part of the voting process.

Luke A. Bronin, Mayor, City of Hartford, Connecticut: Mayor Bronin testified that Connecticut is one of only a handful of states that does not allow early voting. By doing so, it would dramatically expand access to the ballot box which would strengthen the state's democracy. They explained that the percentage of voters voting on election day has been declining over the past several decades. Mayor Bronin stated that allowing early voting would lower the barrier to entry for our democracy and make election-day operations smoother.

Rhonda Caldwell, Lead Organizer, Hamden Action NOW, Town of Hamden: Caldwell testified that Connecticut is one of the most voter suppressed states in the nation. They explained that 502,235 eligible voters did not vote in the 2016 election. Barriers such as long lines at polling places, weather, the times in which the polls are open, accessibility for people with disabilities, and language barriers disenfranchises CT voters. They stated that allowing early voting would allow voters more flexibility to cast their vote.

Marilyn P. Carroll, President, League of Women Voters of Ridgefield: Carroll testified that allowing early voting would make it possible for Connecticut voters to decide if they want to make voting more convenient and safe. Once passed, Legislators can then determine the appropriate details to put these practices into action.

Maureen Chalmers, President, The 4Cs, SEIU Local 1973: Chalmers provided testimony stating that allowing early voting would ensure that all eligible and registered voters will have a greater opportunity to participate in our democracy.

Nancy J. Dinardo, Chair, Connecticut Democratic State Central Committee: Dinardo testified that allowing for early voting is overdue and would provide voters and easy, safe and uninhibited access to cast their vote.

Gretchen Raffa, MSW, Senior Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Organizing, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.: In their testimony, Raffa stated that it is necessary to secure voting rights for all voters. They explain that the ability to preserve and expand access to reproductive rights is directly correlated to the right to vote. Raffa testified that the 2020 election reached near-record highs. According to Raffa, getting to the polls on election day can be hard for working families which can force some to have to choose between family/work obligations and their ability to vote. Making early voting an option would eliminate that conflict. Raffa explains that the reproductive lives of people of color, young people, the LGBTQ community and people in low-income communities are always at stake during the election season making it imperative that every eligible voter gets an equal opportunity to participate in the election.

Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut: Quickmire testified that 79% of voters are in favor of early voting and 43 states offer in person early voting options. They state that approval of the State Constitutional Amendments will provide Connecticut with the opportunity to enact laws and put practices in place to allow voters to cast their ballot before Election Day.

Anna M. Posniak, Windsor Town Clerk and President, Connecticut Town Clerks Association: Posniak testified that allowing early voting would create less strain on each of the various methods of voting because voting would be spread over three months. They

stated that a legislative task force should be created in order to examine the changes to statute, procedures, funding and technology upgrades that will be necessary to make early voting successful. Posniak explained that by modernizing our elections process the voters of Connecticut will have the greatest access to the ballot.

John Erlingheuser, AARP Connecticut: Erlingheuser explained in their testimony that there are many flaws within the state's election system such as registration impediments, long lines, lack of early voting opportunities, inadequate facilities, equipment, staff at polling places and language barriers. These flaws make it more difficult for citizens to vote. Erlingheuser stated that passing this bill would give voters the opportunity to determine if we should change our constitution.

The following organizations submitted testimony in support of HJ 59:

(SEIU-CT)

AARP CT

ACLU CT

Bishop John Selders, Co-Founder, Moral Monday CT

Callie Heilmann – Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now Votes

Catherine John, Lead Organizer, Black and Brown United in Action

Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director, Common Cause Connecticut

Common Cause Connecticut

Connecticut Town Clerks Association

Darryl Brackeen Jr., Chair, Generation Change CT

Every Vote Counts, Yale Chapter

GenerationChangeCT

Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Organizing, Planned

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

Ingrid Alvarez, Vice President for Police and Strategic Engagement, Hispanic Federation

Jamilah Prince-Stewart, Executive Director, FaithActs for Education

Jan Hochadel, President, American Federation of Teachers Connecticut (AFT-CT)

Jeff Leake, President, Connecticut Education Association

Jewish Community Relations Council

Judy Villa, Resolutions Chair, National Federation of Democratic Women

League of Women Voters of Connecticut

Lori Brown, Executive Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters

Luther Weeks, Executive Director, CTVotersCount

Make the Road Connecticut

Nancy DiNardo, Chair, Connecticut Democratic State Central Committee

New Haven Rising

Pamela Selders, Founder, CT Black Women

Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.

Sal Luciano, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO

Southern New England Conference United Church of Christ

Stacey Zimmerman, Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council

Steering Committee for WOW

Stephen Anderson, President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001

Susan L Yolen, Board Member, PoliticaCT

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut
Will Wilder, Fellow, Voting Rights and Elections Program Brennan Center for Justice at NYU
Winston Heimer, Executive Vice President, Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans

Testimony in support of HJ 59 from elected officials in Connecticut:

Luke Bronin, Mayor of Hartford, Connecticut
Jim Jinks, Town Councilor, Cheshire, Connecticut
Barbara Richardson Crouch, Registrar of Voters, Sprague, Connecticut
Lisa Thomas, Councilwoman, Coventry, Connecticut

The Government Administration and Elections Committee received via email over 400 pieces of testimony in support of HJ 59. They cited reasons similar to those stated in the aforementioned testimonies. All copies of testimony are available on the Committee website under Testimony.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Anthony Rinaldi, Resident, Wolcott, Connecticut: Rinaldi testified that they are not confident that the state's major cities are providing adequate election monitoring and transparency. They explained that the changes implemented due to COVID-19 should be eliminated as most citizens are capable of voting in person in a safe manner.

Dominic Rapini, Chairman of the Board, Fight Voter Fraud, Inc.: Rapini testified that allowing early voting would undermine trust and do not fix core issues that currently exist in our election infrastructure. Rapini stated that early voting could actually decrease turnout according to studies done by American University and University of Wisconsin in 2008 which showed that ten states with convenience voting had decreased turnout. Rapini also testified that early voting would diminish our democracy because they enable citizens to cast their vote without the proper knowledge of their candidates and their platforms. According to Rapini, Connecticut must focus on cleaning the state's voter rolls and strengthening the election infrastructure.

Richard Sebastian, Resident, Prospect, Connecticut: Sebastian stated within their testimony that casting a vote earlier than two weeks prior to election day deprives the voter of information about the candidate that they may learn as election day approaches.

Arnold L. Goldman, Chairman, Canton Republican Town Committee: Goldman testified that changing the election laws create space for the perception or reality of improper voting that would undermine the validity of the election results. They explain that it is the voters obligation to appear on election day, prove their identity as well as their right to vote. Loosening the rules regarding elections could invite mischiefs and potentially weaken the confidence that citizens have in their elections.

Beverly Hanna, Resident, Oxford, Connecticut: Hanna testified that voting is a privilege and should be held on a single day. They explain that the day should be made a holiday and if a voter cannot make it, they should then use a secure absentee ballot to cast their vote.

Cherie Juhnke, Resident, Plainville, Connecticut: Juhnke stated that if someone is unable to vote on Election Day, they should then apply for an absentee ballot. Juhnke testified that

the state should resume its standard voting practices, doing so safely and keeping the elections secure.

Mickey LaCrosse, Resident, Shelton, Connecticut: LaCrosse testified that voting days do not need to be extended. If a voter is aware that they will not be able to vote in person on Election day, they can then apply for an absentee ballot.

Anne Manusky, President, Connecticut Republican Assembly (CTRA): Manusky testified that Connecticut has election issues that have still not been remediated over the years; one being that Connecticut is not in compliance with the Federal Motor-Voter law. They also state that if someone is unable to vote in person on election day, they can cast their vote by requesting an absentee ballot.

John and Patricia MacDonald, Residents, Ridgefield, Connecticut: John and Patricia MacDonald testified that allowing early voting has the capacity to encourage election fraud.

Valerie Gesualdi, Resident, New Canaan, Connecticut: Valerie Gesualdi testified that the voter rolls need to first be cleaned before considering expanding voter access. They explained that having one day to vote is plenty of time. They offer the comparison; "Bills are due 1 day a month and we all seem to be able to manage that. Voting doesn't even happen that often that it should take days to vote".

Albert Tartaglino, Resident, West Hartland, Connecticut: Albert Tartaglino testified that early voting is not required due to the current provision for absentee balloting.

Helen Whatley, Resident, East Haddam, Connecticut: Helen Whatley testified that Due to the current provisions that allow voters to apply for an absentee ballot if they are unable to vote on election day allowing early voting is unnecessary and possibly detrimental to a secure voting process.

John Koch, Resident, Shelton, Connecticut: John Koch testified that allowing early voting will further reduce the integrity of the election process. They stated that if the goal is to increase voter participation, then the state should consider declaring election day a holiday to make it easier for people to vote in person.

The following organizations submitted testimony in opposition to the resolution allowing for a constitutional amendment to permit no-excuse absentee voting:

Linda Szynowicz, Founder and CEO, Fight Voter Fraud Inc.
Anne Manusky, President, Connecticut Republican Assembly (CTRA)
Arnold Goldman, Chairman, Canton Republican Town Committee

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Reported by: Jenna Schwerdtle

Date: 3-5-21

