

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HJ-1

RESOLUTION APPROVING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO

Title: ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING.

Vote Date: 3/15//2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/22/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To allow the voters of Connecticut to vote via absentee ballot, regardless of reason, in an effort to increase voter turnout and accessibility.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State, Office of the Secretary of the State testified in support of No-Excuse Absentee Voting. She stated that during the pandemic 35% of total votes were cast via absentee ballot, and she believes that the voters of CT approving early voting is a clear sign that they would like easier ballot access.

Werner Oyanadel, Latino & Puerto Rican Policy Director, CWCSEO emphasized the same statistics in regards to absentee ballots as the SOTS. They agree with the mission of no-excuse absentee ballots in order to make voting more accessible. They also asked that the committee considering adding to the bill a requirement to send automatic ballot applications in order to assist voters.

Representative Vincent Candelora, House Minority Leader, House Republican Caucus quoted Senator Looney in saying "And I think that was -- that is legitimately controversial. Because in reality we never really know for sure who is casting an absentee ballot" and agreed with this statement. He said given both support for early voting and no-excuse absentee, he believes such significant changes to election laws without safeguards to protect against undue influence and bad actors will only further undermine confidence in CT elections.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Deena Allard testified in support of no-excuse absentee balloting, she explained her experiences with difficulties in voting, given her husband's sometimes long and strange hours as well as her being in the last trimester of her pregnancy around election day.

LeReine Frampton and Erica Canfield, Registrars of Voters, Town of Newtown testified in favor of no-excuse absentee ballots, particularly as an alternative to early voting. They said it is much more efficient and cheaper to staff than early voting. They also expressed their support for the envelope method of collecting absentee ballots.

Paula Bacolini, Founder, Make Voting Easy-CT emphasized her idea that the voters want choice. The choice to vote which ever way is easiest for them. She also expressed her gratitude as a senior for being able to vote absentee during COVID.

Alice Baxter emphasized the importance of voter not having to choose between their health and their right to vote.

Mendi Blue Paca, President & CEO, Fairfield County's Community Foundation noted that it is important that CT dedicate the proper time and resources to get no-excuse absentee balloting done right, particularly since early voting is also getting implemented.

Joseph Bobrow emphasized the importance of voting being as accessible as possible in a democratic system.

John Brady, Executive Vice President, AFTCT emphasized the importance of passing this bill during the current long session, in order to give the voters plenty of notice that no-excuse absentee voting will be on the ballot.

Kathleen Callahan, Co-Chair, NASW noted that with future health threats uncertain it is important to maintain no-excuse absentee ballots as an option. She also applauded the committee's work in making voting more accessible.

Additional support citing similar reasons was provided by:

Michael Bailey
Janet Bellamy
Joelle Berger
Leslie Blank
Robert Blank
Bobbi Essagof
Richard Boritz
Deborah Brody
Linda Bronstein
Deborah Calloway
Michael Carrington
Marilyn Carroll
Jane Cavanaugh
Martin Cobern

Queenie Collins
Thomas Connolly
Sharon Conway
Ruth Cook
Laura Copland
Nicole Sanclemente
Marta Daniels
Gemeem Davis
Jennifer Dayton
Aziz Dehkan
Christine Denning
Nancy Dinardo
Brian Donahue
Cathleen Donnelly
Robin Druckman
Cynthia Del
Doris Dumas
Barbara Edinburg
Karen Edwards
Lawrence Edwards
Elizabeth Eldridge
John Erlingheuser
Vera Esdaile
Diana Evans
Win Evarts
Patrick Fairly
Stephanie FitzGerald
Terry Fitzgerald
Kathy Flaherty
Pua Ford
Seth Freeman
Timothy Gabriele
Ann Gadwah
Alfreda Gaither
Callie Gale Heilmann
Cheryl Galloway
Sarah Ganong
Christine Gianquinto
Lauren Gray
Lee Greenhouse
MaryAnn Guglielmo
Ashley Gulyas
Jim Gustin
Leanne Harpin
Maureen Harry
Ed Hawthorne
Jaclyn Kusluch-Hebron
Laurie Heiss
Sally Hill

Harald Hillie
Jenny Hillie
Beth Hillson
Bayly Hoehne
Patricia Holloway
Annie Hornish
Damian Humphrey
Nancy Hutchinson
Lynne Ide
Michele Jacklin
Sondi Jackson
Catherine Jacobson
Bessie Jefferson
Joanne Steinhart
Jacqueline Johnson
Brian Kabcenell
Jackie Kaiko
Lisa Kelly
Jody Kesten
Mary Lee Kiernan
Nicole Klein
Edwar Koistinen
Julianna Larue
Andrea Levine
Angela Liptack
Elizabeth Litt
John Matz
Susan Mazur
Caroline Miller
Michele Millham
Meredith Molyneux
Leslee Asch-Morrison
Carole Mulready
Arlene Murphy
Erika Murphy
Deborah Murray
Georgia Newcomb
Yvonne Senturia
Adrienne Parkmond
Tameeka Parks
Jonathan Perloe
Joyce Petteway
Nerlyn Pierson
Halina Platt
Merla Porter
Kathleen Powers
Charlotte Pyle
Laly Rakotoniaina
Jacqueline Randolph

Carol Rizzolo
Lawrence Rizzolo
Abigail Roth
Pegeen Rubinstein
Patricia Saavedra
David Sales
Alison Sanchirico
Judith Sanchirico
Thomas Sanchirico
Helen Sandalls
Alison Scherer
David and Marge Schneider
Jeffery Schwartz
Charmaine Seavy
Chris Sencal
Susan Singer
Pat Sirulnick
Celia Smith
Judith Sparer
Kenneth Speyer
Patricia Spruance
Stephen Stern
Tom Stewart
Sarah Sullivan
Lynn Taborsak
Ellen Thomson
Karen Tracy
Yvonne Tuttle
Yann van Heurck
Roseann Ventimiglia
Alex Villamil
Herman Vogel
Vicki Volper
Amber Walsh
Claire Walsh
Dave Walsh
Irene Weiss
Sherry Wernicke
Lisa Wiesner
Dean Williams
Steven Winter
Travis Woodward
Jess Zaccagnino
Steve Zales
Stacey Zimmerman

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Carol P. Cangiano expressed her opposition to no-excuse absentee balloting. She stated that anyone who wants to vote should vote on election day and anyone who wants to but can't should request an absentee ballot. She also asked that election day be made a state holiday.

John Chunis explained that since absentee ballots can be lost, stolen, or otherwise susceptible to fraud, absentee balloting should only be for people who have no other option, and not for anyone.

Linda Dalessio asked that if absentee balloting is going to be expanded, that the state do more to ensure election integrity. Monitoring drop boxes, requiring ID, or requiring that the voter themselves requests the absentee ballot, are always to ensure that the voters are voting in a safe and fair election. She explained that any disparity that influences the outcome of the election disenfranchises every voter. She also requested that election day be a legal holiday.

Jennifer Damon asked that the state clean and audit aspects of voting like ERIC, tabulators and voter rolls before expanding voting access. She also referenced her issues with the voting process referencing absentee ballots, applications, and chain of custody issues that occurred this last election.

Debbie Esposito explained that voting is a sacred privilege and she feels that allowing anyone to vote by mail devalues the experience. She also noted that CT allows for a 2 hour paid break in order to vote, so work shouldn't be an issue.

Kathleen Misset explained that through her election canvassing with a grassroots voter integrity group, they discovered that absentee ballots are the weak spot for voting fraud in our current system. She said they found instances of people who had moved voting and submitted them to the SEEC. She said she would prefer if absentee voting stayed the same as it was before COVID, requested with ID and reason as well as a signature.

Katherine Sarris asked that the state simplify its voting processes and have more transparency. She said the safeguards set in place right now do not actually deter people, and during her time as an assistant registrar she has experienced voters who feel completely disenfranchised like their vote doesn't matter since the system doesn't protect votes and isn't transparent. She asked that the state work on its issues before expanding.

Amberly Wang wrote that Americans have fought so hard for so long to preserve their right to vote in free and fair elections, and that the focus should be on having elections that remains, safe, fair, and free.

The following individuals testified in opposition and cited similar issues:

Diane Jamieson
Philip Murphy

Reported by: Jonathan Lukasiewicz

Date: 3/15/2023