

# Government Administration and Elections Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1226  
AN ACT CONCERNING STATE VOTING RIGHTS IN RECOGNITION OF JOHN  
**Title:** R. LEWIS.  
**Vote Date:** 03/27/2023  
**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute  
**PH Date:** 3/20/2023  
**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation ensures that there are methods in place to prevent discrimination and suppression in Connecticut elections. It requires municipalities who have a history of voter infringement to clear any changes in procedures for voting and election administration with the Secretary of the State. This bill provides greater assistance for those for whom English is a second language, letting them vote in their native language and creates a central location for collection of election data to ensure transparency.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

#### **Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State of Connecticut**

SB1226 provides voters with checks and balances, assuring transparency in the voting process. Any city or town with a history of voter infringement must work with the Secretary of the State on any changes they wish to make regarding either elections or voting methods. The ability to cast a ballot in one's native language is part of this bill, as is the establishment of an accessible hub for all election information and data.

#### **Werner Oyanadel, Latino Policy Director, the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO)**

**Supports;** the CWCSEO supports this bill because it would "eliminate systematic inequalities in the voting process and in essence protect voting rights of all voters by expanding the tools available for voting-rights protections." Additionally, they support expanded language

assistance, anti-intimidation tactics, a standardized database with elections and demographic data, and making it more difficult for officials to discriminate against people when voting.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Timothy DeCarlo, Registrars of Voters Assoc. of Conn.**

**Supports.** ROVAC believes in the rights of voters and their ability to exercise their rights. This organization is in concert with the actions taken in this legislation.

### **Jess Zaccagnino, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut**

**Supports.** This bill creates a vehicle to report voter suppression, and improper election administration decisions. Cities and towns that have been reported for any of these have to report any voter policy or registration changes to the Secretary of the State before implementing them. There will be a central hub of election and voter information created that will be available for perusal.

### **Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO**

**Supports.** This bill provides the means to make elections in Connecticut more viable and accessible to minorities. By forcing cities and towns who have, in the past, restricted minorities through local election-related changes, report any such changes of either voter information or registration to the Secretary of the State, minority voters are protected. Having the ability to read and vote with ballots in their native language is necessary as is a central hub of voter information and data.

### **Stacey Zimmerman, Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council SEIU**

**Supports.** This bill expands the language assistance in voting to include more translation and native language access to voter information and ballots.

### **Yanidsi Velez, New England Regional Director for Hispanic Federation**

**Supports.** The legislation provides basic rights for minorities not covered in the federal election laws. It provides protections for minorities by cities and towns who have impeded the elections process for minorities. They answer to the Secretary of the State, who requires them to provide a draft of any policy changes to elections procedures or voter registration before instituting it. This bill also allows native language voter information and ballots, as well as translators, as needed.

### **Reggie Thedford, Deputy Political Director, Stand Up America**

**Supports.** This bill addresses issues regarding minority voting problems. It provides ballots and voter information in the native language of the voter and protects the voter from any discrimination by overseeing municipalities that have a history of them.

### **Susan L. Yolen, PoliticaCT**

**Supports.** This ensures protection from municipalities intent on impeding the elections process in the case of the minority population. It also provides voter assistance in languages other than English where the need exists.

**Stacey Sobel, Regional Director, Anti-Defamation League Connecticut**

**Supports.** This bill provides accessible polling locations, assistance in native language voter information and ballots.

**Barbara Wheeler**

**Supports.** Concerned that the Federal courts have weakened our Federal Voting Rights Act. Feels no one should be barred from voting.

**Patricia Rossi, Vice President for Advocacy and Public Issues, League of Women Voters of Connecticut**

**Supports.** This bill protects the right to vote. It addresses several problems and the LWVC is concerned that with the potential lack of polling places, after which voters will again be lined up for hours waiting to vote,

**Vicki Volper**

**Supports.** The bill ensures that there is recourse when a municipality attempts to impede the voting rights of minority voters. It also makes sure that minorities have the ability to vote in their native language.

**Diana Evans**

**Supports.** Language assistance for registered minority voters is covered in this bill as is the rights of each voter to receive timely access to voting. Should there be past issues with voter intimidation or issues with voters casting their ballot, these cities and towns must provide the Secretary of the State with any proposed voter and registration changes before implementing them.

**Emily Hofstatter**

**Supports.** The legislation provides minorities with different ways to make voting easier for them while ensuring that municipalities provide them equal access to the ballot box.

**Donna Grossman, Voter Choice Connecticut**

**Supports.** This legislation strengthens the ability of minority voters to participate wholly in the election process. Providing equal access to the ballot box for all, is a right for any registered voter in our state.

**Sally Hill**

**Supports.** The provisions forcing cities and towns, who have had any voter registration or voting problems, to report any changes to the voting process to the Secretary of the State, providing voter information and ballots in the voters' native language and the collection of election data to a central hub for transparency, are instituted to give all voters the chance to vote and participate in our elections process.

**Barbara Edinberg**

**Supports.** The voter registration among minority voters is very low. By assuring that municipalities adhere to voting and registration procedures to make this process easier, with emphasis on those cities and towns who have put impediments in the way and must now provide the Secretary of the State with any changes to their policies, there is greater transparency. Language assistance is key in making ballots more accessible and readable in

the native language of the voter. Having a central data election hub provides more information more readily.

**Christine Denning**

**Supports.** This legislation will put Connecticut on top, as a leader in voting rights by establishing three basic and important sections. First, it provides for a "pre-clearance" section to assure that all actions by towns and cities when changing local voting and registration procedures, when known in the past to restrict these, are brought to the attention of the Secretary of the State. By allowing registered voters to cast ballots in their native language, is extremely helpful, making these voters more comfortable with the procedure. In addition, by providing centralized access to voter information and collected election data, there is more transparency in the system.

**Dori Dumas, President, New Haven NAACP**

**Supports.** This roots out racially motivated voter discrimination in voting. By making cities and towns, who have past incidences of voter suppression, clear any voting procedure or registration changes with the Secretary of the State, minority voters are protected.

**Steven Lance, Policy Counsel-NAACP Legal Defense Fund**

**Supports.** The "pre-clearing" of any voter related changes by municipalities before their inception is critical. By the Secretary of the State overseeing this, voter integrity is guaranteed. This is especially true when cities and towns have effectively discriminated against minority voters and are now able to be looked at more closely. By providing registered voters who are not proficient in English with information and ballots in their native language, the voting process is made simpler and more available. Also, creating a centralized "hub" of elections information, transparency is provided in our system.

**Teran Loeppke, Common Cause in Connecticut**

**Supports.** The purpose of this legislation is to provide state protection for voting rights through oversight by the Secretary of the State of municipalities who make changes in voter, registration policies, with intent on those who have, in the past, created voting obstacles for minority voters. Providing ballot and voting information to voters in their native language helps them understand and become comfortable with the voting process.

**Nancy Meyers**

**Supports.** Every citizen has the right to vote. Also, every citizen has the right to register to vote and have it be a fair process.

**Isabelle Muhlbauer, Voting Rights Coordinator, LatinoJustice PRLDEF**

**Supports.** This organization supports this bill because of their desire to create a more just society by transforming current voting infrastructure to be more equitable and accessible through community empowerment. Importantly, this bill provides more equitable access to voting at the ballot box for black and brown voters. However, the federal Voting Rights Act requires only ten towns to have language assistance, but this bill would expand municipalities to provide language translation to expand language assistance to minority groups in Connecticut – 275,000 Connecticut residents have limited English proficiency.

**Davis Gemeen, President & Co-Director, Callie Gale Heilmann, Co-Director, Bridgeport Generation Now Votes**

**Supports.** This bill has two strong points. These are a private right of action against voter disenfranchisement and a preclearance section keeping municipalities from instituting voting laws that would intimidate minority voters and opens the door for those who have dealt with voter discrimination to bring it to court. The data hub provides a new level of transparency.

**Rep. Hubert Delany, Connecticut State Legislature**

**Supports.** This bill effectively prevents the intimidation of voters. It assures language assistance for minority voters and opens the door for those who have dealt with voter discrimination to bring it to court. Creating a data hub of voter information is important to make election information available.

**Katie Digianantonia**

**Supports.** To strengthen voting rights that have been decimated by the Federal Voting Rights Act, this bill is needed. Our elections system needs these sections to assure voter access to the polls.

**Scott X.Epdale, President, Connecticut NAACP State Conference.**

**Supports.** This bill, through it's preclearance section, the section strengthening state protections against voter obstruction, affording voters language assistance and creating a central data base for election, voter information, is needed to make voting more accessible.

**Diana Evans**

**Supports.** This bill provides many tools to strengthen voting rights in Connecticut, as well as the support of minorities when faced with disenfranchisement and easy access to voting.

**Walter Fritsch, Jr.**

**Supports.** S.B.1226 gives minorities as well as their representative organizations, the ability to act against voter obstruction in municipal law as well as voter assistance in providing native language information.

**Ba Galek**

**Supports.** The provision in this bill assisting voters by instituting native language election information and ballots, helps the minority community to become more knowledgeable and comfortable with the election process.

**Avery Gilbert, Strategic Advocacy Clinic, Yale**

**Supports.** This bill protects minority voters, who have systemically been suppressed through disenfranchisement and obstruction on many levels. It provides native language voter information, as well as translators, gives voters who choose to bring private action claims against such treatment to court the vehicle to do so, oversees election laws of municipalities to assure there is no discrimination and provides a central data base of voter/election information for the public.

**L. Hunter Williams**

**Supports.** This legislation gives minority voters access to understandable voter information and ballots by providing native language text, assures that municipalities cannot create laws or regulations disenfranchising either the voter or their representative, without penalty.

**Marie L'Heureux**

**Supports.** This assures that our system of elections is pro-voter and encourages greater participation. This bill makes several provisions to provide this to minority voters.

**Harald Hille**

**Supports.** With the inclusion of "preclearance" language, language assistance for minority voters and a centralized hub of pertinent data information regarding elections, this bill is a big step toward inclusion.

**Lynne Ide, Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut**

**Supports.** The expanded language assistance, as well as the ability to file a private claim against voter disenfranchisement, goes far in strengthening voter rights. Also, the oversight of cities and towns who have obstructed minority voting, by the Secretary of State, is a boon to a freer vote.

**Stephen Karp, Executive Committee, NASWCT**

**Supports.** This bill affords minority voters more protections against disenfranchisement in the voting place, expanded language assistance, the right of private claim against obstruction in court and the creation of a central hub of election, voter information.

**Julianna Larue, Climate Policy & Outreach Coordinator, CT League of Conservation**

**Voters.**

**Supports.** This bill provides protections against voter disenfranchisement, including the right to bring private claim to court, monitoring any municipalities laws that have, in the past, created voter obstruction or intimidation.

**Janet & James Luongo, Individual Democracy Actions**

**Supports.** The inclusion of many protections for voters who face disenfranchisement, intimidation or voter obstruction is supported. Through expansion of language assistance and oversight of municipal election law changes that could harm minorities, this legislation serves to further support the minority vote.

**Jennifer Eazarsky**

**Supports.** This legislation protects minority voters by giving them the ability to take a private right of action against cities and towns that suppress or obstruct their voting rights.

**Laly Noya Rakotoniaina, CEO, MCSI**

**Supports.** This bill would "root out racial discrimination in voting." Additionally, it would expand language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency. Plus, this bill would enable organizations that represent voters of color with the right of action against municipalities that obstruct voters rights.

**Carol Reimers**

**Supports.** There is support of this bill because it would offer the most inclusive and protected voting experience in the United States. Therefore, eliminating barriers will encourage minority voters to register and make their vote count in elections; there is only a positive impact on Connecticut.

### **Carol Rizzolo**

**Supports.** The support this bill is because it would eliminate voter suppression tactics, expand language assistance for non-native English speakers or those with low English proficiency, assemble legal tools for affected voters by voter suppression and hold perpetrators accountable, create a well-funded database for voter suppression to confirm beliefs and accounts.

### **Maia Roothaan**

**Supports.** This bill would make voting more equitable and defend against discriminatory voting practices. However, the Federal Voting Rights Act has withered over recent years and has left voters of color vulnerable. Furthermore, they state that states should strive for diversity in our government, however, this can't be achieved if there are discriminatory voting practices blocking large populations from voting in elections; Connecticut must strive to be a bastion of voting equality.

### **Alison V. Scherer**

**Supports.** This legislation provides voter protection that is not present on the Federal level. There is extensive voter discrimination and Connecticut has done its job by instituting three essential components. First, any municipality must provide any proposed changes in voter information or registration to the Secretary of the State. Should there have been any voter discrimination previously, the Secretary of the State must check for any irregularities. The requirement that registered voters be able to access voter information and ballots in their native language is helpful to minority voters. We must encourage minority voters to register and vote.

### **Diane Stradling**

**Supports.** SB1226 removes potential obstacles for minority voters. It assures that any adverse policies to potentially be installed in municipalities will be overseen by the Secretary of the State, as well as providing native tongue voter and ballot information for registered voters.

### **Deborah Murray**

**Supports.** Deborah lives in Bridgeport which has a diverse population with many people of color who's voting rights are consistently abrogated. Additionally, they suggest providing legal tools to fight discriminatory voting rules, expanding language assistance, stronger protections against voter intimidation, and creating a central hub for election data with demographic information that's main purpose is to empower officials and communities to guarantee accessible elections.

### **Barbara Kapustynski**

**Supports.** Feels that early voting is essential. Many people cannot be at the polls and would be able to vote when given more time.

### **Paula Bacolini, Making Voting Easy-CT**

**Supports.** This bill provides protection for voters by monitoring municipalities regarding any proposed changes in either voter registration or actual voting processes. It also makes sure anyone dealing with a language barrier be able to vote using a ballot in their native language. This assures that they are aware of whom they are voting. The various changes make voting

more transparent and easier, as the John Lewis Voting Rights Act has not been passed on the federal level.

**Claire Walsh, Democracy Women in Action**

**Supports.** This legislation takes away barriers, giving more equal access to both the voting booth and information for minorities. This prevents voter intimidation and obstruction through "pre-clearing" of changes by the Secretary of the State of any municipal changes to policy and voter access, gives minorities the ability to read election material and cast a ballot in their native language.

**Melanie Wyler**

**Supports.** This bill makes access to voting much easier for minorities by providing native language ballots, review of municipal changes in voter policy and registration by the Secretary of the State, when there is a history of voter suppression, and the creation of a central core of election, voter data.

**Marta Daniels**

**Supports.** The bill provides three very important provisions to assist in both minority voting and possible voter infringement. By instituting the policy that any city or town that has a history of suppressing minority voters, now has to consult the office of the Secretary of The State when making any changes to their voting system. Creating a central place for voter data and information makes the system more viable.

**Richard Boritz**

**Supports.** The legislation assures that there is no voter discrimination with regard to minorities, in Connecticut. It provides policies dealing with towns and cities who attempt to change voting or registration methods that adversely affect the minority population. Also, it provides that any citizen who cannot read a ballot or instruction sue to a language barrier, be given these in their native language, assuring they can vote with confidence.

**Herman Vogel**

**Supports.** Minority voters in cities and towns, who feel there is voter discrimination, may address that through the Secretary of the State, who will then monitor closely any changes such municipality would propose regarding voter information and registration.

**Linda Carlson**

**Supports.** This bill addresses the concern about voters of color whose voting rights are in question. It enhances the transparency of the voting process, assuring that municipalities, with past issues of voter infringement, are monitored and must report any changes in their election system to the Secretary of the State. This provides the ability for voters to cast a ballot in their native language.

**Valencia Richardson, Advancing Democracy Through Law**

**Supports.** This legislation provides a means to avoid lengthy litigation and gives the opportunity to claim discrimination in a timely manner, with a timely result expected. It addresses several issues with regard to voter obstruction and the rights of minorities in the justice system when faced with voter discrimination.



**Lucas Rodriguez, Clinic Student, Harvard Election Law Clinic.**

**Supports.** This bill expands the ability of minority voters to have native language ballots and election information, assures that municipalities with a history of voter obstruction have to present to the Secretary of the State, any changes in their election laws. The establishment of a voter and elections database for the state will give the system a greater sense of transparency.

**Martin E. Cohen**

**Supports.** This legislation provides language assistance on instructions and ballots in the native language of registered voters. The Secretary of the State has required that any municipality that has had any inappropriate elections actions, report any changes in either voting procedures or registration, report to her office.

**Laura Copeland**

**Supports.** Broadening language assistance in voting, as well as addressing voter suppression by installing policies relating to cities and towns and any proposed changes in their voting or registration procedures, are several items in the bill.

**Joelle Fishman, Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans and the Peoples Center**

**Supports.** The purpose of this bill is to expand voting rights to minorities through providing election and ballot information in their native language, assure that cities and towns follow the law when changing policies regarding voting and registration and create a centralized date information hub of all election information.

**Robert Fritsch**

**Supports.** This bill addresses obstacles that minorities face when voting. Any municipality that has restricted voting in any manner in the past, must report any proposed changes regarding any election or differences in policies regarding voters or voter registration to the Secretary of the State. By providing voter information and ballots in the native language of the registered voter, we are assured that they have access to and understand this information.

**Michael Garman**

**Supports.** The addition of both voting information and a ballot in the voter's native language is very important for their understanding. Also, by monitoring municipalities that have a history of voter intimidation, making them report any changes to voter information or registration to the Secretary of the State, is an important step in transparency, as is the establishment of a central hub of voter data.

**Evelyn Avoglia**

**Supports.** Practices that make it harder for voters to participate in elections cause disenfranchisement, discouraging many minority voters. Passing this legislation makes our democracy stronger.

**Corrie Betts, President, Greater Hartford Branch, NAACP**

**Supports.** This legislation brings Connecticut to the forefront as an example of strong, enabling voting rights for all. Minorities benefit from this bill as it provides many methods of

accessing the voting booth as well as remedies when this is denied. The "preclearance program", voter assistance for minority voters and the ability to claim voter obstruction by municipalities, all make this a necessary piece of legislation.

### **Terrance Carroll, Fair Vote Action**

**Supports.** The language assistance provision opens the process for minority voters. By instituting the preclearance section, local governments cannot change election regulations. This bill also gives greater recourse to those claiming voter discrimination in court. The data hub introduces voter transparency through compilation of voting information.

### **Katherine Nelson**

**Supports.** This bill addresses issues with minority voters and the problems they face. It provides recourse to those who face discrimination due to municipal law changes and gives minority voters an option of native language voter information and ballots, giving them a greater sense of inclusivity in the voting process.

### **Linda Pryde**

**Supports.** Minority voters, through expanded language assistance and oversight of municipal laws in instances of voter obstruction, have strengthened laws to assure there is no disenfranchisement. The creation of a central hub of elections/voter information provides transparency in the elections system.

### **Arlene Murphy**

**Supports.** The right to vote makes our democracy and country stronger. It is important to protect our state's voters.

### **Elizabeth Comstock**

**Supports.** The bill introduces greater access to minority voters by providing the ballots and information in their native language. It allows minorities and their representatives to act against municipalities that attempt to impede their voting rights.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

### **Linda Dalessio**

**Opposes.** This bill is in opposition to the Federal election legislation. It is going against existing law.

### **Susan Bradford**

**Opposes.** These changes complicate the voter process. The new provisions also make it more costly.

### **Debbie Esposito**

**Opposes.** Expansion of the voter data base is irresponsible unless the information can be verified. English is the language of our State and Nation, and we should not spend money

providing voting material or ballots in another language. These proposals do not provide security and increase the ability to create fraud.

**Anne Manusky, M.Ed., President Connecticut Republican Assembly**

**Opposes.** Feels that the "alternative method of election" and "racially polarized voting" are of no purpose to the people of Connecticut. John Lewis has nothing to do with either the people or the state of Connecticut.

**Dan Marcil**

**Opposes.** This legislation, supporting ranked choice voting, is a bad idea.

**Kathleen Misset**

**Opposes.** Connecticut has a terrible record of keeping up to date voter records. Also, the provisions proposed are too costly.

**Reported by: Kathleen Zabel**

**Date: 03-27-2023**