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**Testimony of Andy Sauer**  
**Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut**  
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee  
**Wednesday, February 28, 2007**

Good morning. My name is Andy Sauer, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut is nonpartisan, nonprofit citizens' lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. We have more than 4,000 members in Connecticut.

We would like to thank the co-chairs of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, Sen. Gayle Slossberg and Rep. Chris Caruso, and the member of the committee for holding a public hearing today.

Connecticut Common Cause supports the following legislative proposals:

- S. B. No. 1314: An Act Concerning Campaign Finance Reform and The Authority Of The State Elections Enforcement Commission.
- H. J. No. 2 : Resolution Proposing An Amendment To The State Constitution To Provide A Four-Year Term Of Service For Members Of The General Assembly And To Create An Alternating Election Cycle For Such Members.
- S. B. No. 42 : An Act Concerning An Agreement Among The States To Elect The President Of The United States By National Popular Vote.
- S. B. No. 542 : An Act Concerning The Posting Of Public Meeting Notices On Public Agency Web Sites.
- S. B. No. 926 : An Act Providing Funds For A Citizenship Training Program.
- H. B. No. 5300 : An Act Concerning Late Mail-In Voter Registration Applications.
- H. B. No. 5619 : An Act Requiring Election Of The Insurance Commissioner.
- H. B. No. 6018 : An Act Authorizing The State To Enter Into A Compact With Other States To Have The President Of The United States Elected By Popular Vote.
- H. B. No. 6251 : An Act Authorizing Election Day Registration.
- H. J. No. 11 : Resolution Proposing An Amendment To The State Constitution To Allow Seventeen-Year-Old Persons Who Will Be Eighteen Years Of Age At The Next Regular Election To Vote In Primaries Related To Such Election.
- H. B. No. 7258 : An Act Concerning Voters With A Disability.

Connecticut Common Cause opposes the following legislative proposals:

- S. B. No. 546 : An Act Restricting The Time Frame For Political Campaign Fundraising.
- S. B. No. 1313 : An Act Concerning Political "Robo" Calls.
- S. B. No. 547 : An Act Concerning Accountability In Campaign Advertising.
- H. B. No. 5989 : An Act Concerning The Process For Issuance Of Absentee Ballots.

## **H. B. No. 6251 : An Act Authorizing Election Day Registration.**

Connecticut Common Cause supports House Bill 6251, An Act Authorizing Election Day Registration. Election Day Registration is a simple way Connecticut can encourage voter participation. It makes voting accessible and convenient by removing many of the barriers to voter participation. With Election Day Registration, all eligible citizens who arrive at the polls are given the chance to vote, even if their names have been incorrectly removed from voting lists or were not added in time for the election.

One of the cruel ironies of our elections is that at the height of political campaigns, when all candidates step up their public appearances, when the news media focuses on the twists and turns of opinion polls, when the blitz of campaign ads hits its zenith in frequency and when perennial nonvoters finally take an interest in the election process, they are unable to vote because they have missed the registration deadline.

It can be a secure and easy way to register voters, and one that can dramatically improve turnout rates. Connecticut could potentially benefit from 10 point increase in voter participation and make it one of the states with the best voter turnout. According to Demos, a nonpartisan public policy research and advocacy organization:

- 746,000 people registered and voted on Election Day, comprising roughly 13 percent of the ballots reported in states that offer Election Day registration.
- In the seven states where Election Day registration is currently used, voter turnout rates were 10 to 12 percentage points higher, on average, than in states that do not offer Election Day registration.
- Five states that offer Election Day registration were among the top 10 states in voter turnout states in 2006 (Minnesota, Montana, Maine, Wisconsin and Wyoming.)

In states where Election Day Registration is provided, state officials report minimal problems with fraud. In fact, Election Day Registration is not unlike registering in person. The same identification requirements are needed. When municipalities become more adept at using the central voter database, Election Day Registration could be the method least likely to be corrupted by fraud.

If there was ever a better time to convert the politically dissatisfied and disenfranchised to take part in the electoral system, it is on Election Day, when the attention on voting and civic duty is at its highest. Election Day Registration is a way in which Connecticut can tap into renewed voter interest.

## **H. B. No. 5989: An Act Concerning The Process For Issuance Of Absentee Ballots**

Connecticut Common Cause opposes House Bill 5989, "An Act Concerning the Process for Issuance of Absentee Ballots." If enacted, such a bill would strip a critical tool from the State Elections Enforcement Commission in enforcing the state's absentee ballot laws. Currently, the law requires people who distribute more than five absentee ballot applications to disclose their name and address. This provides Elections Enforcement a trail from which to follow in the event of an absentee ballot violation complaint. House Bill 5989 aims to remove that requirement and throw Connecticut back to a time when absentee ballot abuse ran amok..

Elections remain one of the most sacred rites in democracy. Governed by volumes of statutes, elections are rigorously monitored and controlled to ensure the sanctity of the democratic process. To that end, polling stations are staffed with a corps of election workers, moderators and observers whose dedication to electoral infection control rivals that of most medical operating rooms. When a voter casts their vote in their polling location, it has been done free of any influence, threats or coercion.

In contrast, an absentee ballot is vulnerable to any sort of pernicious practices or influences. If an individual were motivated to influence absentee balloting, it could be done very easily. In fact, given the number of complaints and subsequent convictions, it is shockingly easy. An individual can distribute absentee ballot applications and provide any form of instructions — accurate or inaccurate, legal or illegal — as to the completion of the form. More troublesome, however, is the return of the same application distributor following the arrival of the absentee ballot, which is not impossible or difficult to determine. This is the moment, where an individual can attempt to influence the absentee ballot voter.

Over the years, the State Elections Enforcement Commission has imposed thousands of dollars in penalties and recommended criminal prosecutions in several incidents of absentee ballot fraud. While those convicted of absentee ballot fraud face prison terms of as much as five years per violation, the damage to democracy is irreparable. A candidate may have been unfairly elected by exploiting a weak spot in the system, thus undermining the credibility of democracy.

**H. B. No. 6018 : An Act Authorizing The State To Enter Into A Compact With Other States To Have The President Of The United States Elected By Popular Vote.**

Connecticut Common Cause supports House Bill 6018 as well as other bills that would have Connecticut join other states to have the United States presidency decided by popular vote. Because of its small number of Electoral College votes, Connecticut has become somewhat irrelevant in presidential politics, as candidates choose to spend their limited time and resources in states with a greater number of Electoral College votes. By passing this bill Connecticut does not create a separate way of distributing Electoral College votes, as Maine and Nebraska do. A national popular vote law, if enacted, would only take effect if the identical law is passed in states that collectively total at least 270 Electoral College votes.

