

ConnPIRG

**Standing Up
To Powerful Interests**

Testimony of Abraham Scarr, Director

Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG)

in support of

HB 5024, An Act Concerning Voting Rights

Chairperson Slossberg, Chairperson Morin and Members of the Committee. My name is Abe Scarr and I am the Director of the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 5024, AAC Voting Rights.

Democracy works best with the active participation of its citizens. Voting is the most basic way to participate in our democracy and serves as a building block to more active involvement in public life. We should make every effort to increase voter participation by making voter registration and the act of voting as simple and accessible to eligible voters as possible.

HB 5024, AAC Voting Rights takes two important steps that should greatly increase voter participation: Election Day Registration, and Online Voter Registration.

Election Day Registration

Election Day Registration significantly boosts voter participation, is cost effective and not an administrative burden for elections officials, and in no way undermines the integrity of the voting system.

Election Day Registration is currently practiced in 9 states and the District of Columbia, with more states actively considering adopting it. The positive impact of Election Day Registration on voter participation is impressive and consistent: states with Election Day Registration historically have voter turnout rates 10 to 12 percentages higher than states without it. North Carolina and Iowa both implemented Election Day Registration between the 2004 and 2008 elections, and both saw large increases in voter turnout. North Carolina had the largest increase in turnout in the country in 2008, where more than 250,000 voters used Election Day Registration to cast ballots.

According to numerous reports by the non-partisan research and advocacy organization Demos, there is no identifiable difference in the cost of administrating elections between states that do and states that do not have Election Day Registration. Further, the costs of implementing Election Day Registration are small. Implementation costs principally consist of training costs and in some instances in additional

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Election Day staffing. The costs of implementing Election Day Registration are more a shift of costs than a creation of new costs. For example, the number of provisional ballots, and the follow up costs associated with verifying them after Election Day, drops substantially in states with Election Day Registration because many people who would otherwise cast a provisional ballot are simply able to register and vote.

Finally, there is no evidence that Election Day Registration is an invitation to fraud. Academic studies as well as investigations by the US Department of Justice and the New Hampshire Attorney General turned up little to no instances of fraud. Amongst those studies, only the Department of Justice found multiple instances of voter impersonation. In its national investigation conducted over three years, it found only four instances of Election Day voter impersonation, and all four defendants were either exonerated or the charges were dropped. The New Hampshire investigation found zero instances of fraud over the same time period.

In conclusion, Election Day Registration is a proven mechanism for improving voter participation that adds minimal or no cost or administrative burdens, and is not susceptible to fraud.

Online Voter Registration

It is time to modernize our elections system. Americans increasingly conduct business, connect with friends and family, and get their news and information online. We can pay taxes online, and should be able to register to vote online as well.

Online voter registration increases voter registration and voter participation, especially among younger voters, and has the potential to save taxpayers significant amounts of money.

Arizona and Washington State were the first states to adopt online voter registration. A report published in April 2010 by the Pew Center on the States found numerous positive impacts from online voter registration in the two states including:

- Internet registration was utilized, not-surprisingly, disproportionately by younger citizens – 60% of the registrations in Washington were from people under 34.
- People who registered to vote online voted in higher rates than those that registered “offline.”
- This turnout difference is higher among young voters: In Arizona in 2008 93% of people under 34 who registered online voted, compared to 73% who registered “offline.”
- Online voter registration is popular both with citizens who utilize it and those that do not.

Increased voter participation among young voters is a particularly important benefit of online voter registration, because people establish voting habits when young. Increasing youth voter turnout is an investment in our democracy.

In a separate report, Pew reports that online voter registration in Maricopa County Arizona costs 3 cents per registration, compared to 83 cents per paper registration.

It is time to bring Connecticut elections into the 21st century. Online voter registration will contribute significantly to increased voter participation while modernizing our elections systems.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. This is my first opportunity to testify before the General Assembly in my new role as the Director of ConnPIRG. Given our mission and history of running non-partisan voter registration drives over the past 28 years, I cannot think of a more appropriate bill to start with than this one. Personally, I have worked for the last decade to recruit and empower students to participate in the political process and have run my share of voter registration and mobilization drives. Many of the top student leaders I have worked with over the years, some of whom are in the room today, first took on leadership in efforts to register their peers to vote.

Passing these reforms will facilitate a more engaged citizenry, from consistent voters to community leaders. I look forward to continuing to work with you throughout the session in an effort to pass this bill into law.

ConnPIRG is a non-partisan, non-profit consumer group that stands up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

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