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**GAE Public Hearing  
Friday, March 2, 2011  
Testimony of Ben Florsheim regarding H.B. No. 5024  
An Act Concerning Voting Rights**

Dear Mr. Chair and members of the committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for H.B. No. 5024, An Act Concerning Voting Rights. It is time for Connecticut to join the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Oregon, Utah, and Washington in pioneering online voter registration, and Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia in allowing same-day voter registration for all elections. Both of these measures are healthy for democracy, as they increase ballot access for citizens while increasing the integrity of the electoral process and limiting its costs.

As a politically engaged college student at Wesleyan University, I spent much of the fall 2011 semester encouraging fellow students to register as voters in Middletown. While I'm proud that the efforts I put in were successful—my fellow activists and I brought in over 500 new registrations and dramatically increased voter turnout—the process was time-consuming and cumbersome. This was due in large part to problems that can be easily solved by allowing online voter registration, as H.B. 5024 does. It is a smart and long-overdue solution to the problems of low voter participation and antediluvian registration processes—particularly for the under-25 demographic that my on-campus efforts targeted (in Washington state, 30% of online registrations are from people aged 18-24).

These reforms are not just geared towards college students, of course: in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's simply easier and vastly more efficient to conduct this type of business online rather than on a paper form that must be mailed or hand-delivered. In Arizona, the first state with online voter registration, 70% of registrations are now processed online; in populous Maricopa County, the cost of voter registration has plunged 96% since the system was implemented ten years ago.

Same-day voter registration is similarly important for the sake of improving voter participation and ballot access. No one wants to wonder about how far in advance he or she must fill out the paperwork in advance of Election Day; indeed, such confusion decreases voter turnout substantially. Voter turnout is consistently 10-12% higher in those states that allow same-day registration for this simple reason.

Many states have had this policy in place for decades, with no negative repercussions; the red herring of voter fraud by those who wish to restrict ballot access has been consistently debunked by overwhelming evidence, while participation has soared. I imagine that if my colleagues and I had been able to use the time we spent registering voters to instead inform our peers about the candidates and their positions and assure them they could show up and register on Election Day (if they chose not to do so online), turnout would have been dramatically higher. Again, this holds true for everyone in Connecticut, not just college students—but the example should be an ample demonstration of the law's benefits.

This bill is, to put it colloquially, a no-brainer. To quote a fellow New Englander whose state recently faced similar questions of voting rights, former Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell of Maine: "The path of history is clear. Our country has consistently marched forward, making our elections more accessible and open, and encouraging more people to participate." I urge the committee to heed Senator Mitchell's words and support H.B. 5024, for the sake of the many Connecticut citizens whose voices deserve to be heard in our democratic process.