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**Testimony of Cheri Quickmire,  
Executive Director, Connecticut Common Cause  
Before Government Administration and Elections Committee  
March 2, 2012**

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Morin and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Cheri Quickmire, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizens' lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. We have more than 7,500 members and activists in Connecticut. I am also a member of the Secretary of the State's Election Performance Task and Civic Health Engagement Task Force.

I applaud Secretary of the State Merrill and Governor Malloy for introducing these important election reforms. I am very pleased that this committee is taking the time to consider how we can modernize and improve our election system by removing existing barriers, safeguarding our voting systems and ensuring the right to vote in free and fair elections for all Connecticut citizens.

**I am here to testify in support of the following bills:**

- **HB 5024 An Act Concerning Voting Rights**
- **HB 5022 An Act Increasing Penalties for Voter Intimidation and Interference**
- **Governor's House Joint Resolution No. 2: Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for No-Excuse Absentee Voting**

**HB 5024, AAC Voting Rights:** Common Cause supports Election Day Registration (EDR), sometimes called "Same Day Registration" as a simple way Connecticut can encourage voter participation. EDR allows eligible voters to register and cast a ballot on Election Day.

Nine states allow voters to register to vote at their polling place on Election Day - Montana (passed in 1960), Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin (1970s), Wyoming, Idaho, New Hampshire (1990s), Iowa (2007) Rhode Island allows it for presidential elections only, and North Carolina (2007) allows new voters to register and vote on the same day during an early voting period just prior to Election Day.

We are a mobile society and a mobile state. We suggest that Election Day Registration would offer many people an opportunity to exercise their right to vote:

- **People Who Move** -- Huge portions of the population move between Presidential elections. In many cases, especially for people who move frequently, updating voter registration is easy to forget. EDR ensures that mobile doesn't have to mean immobilized.
- **Young People** -- Young voters are a huge beneficiary of EDR in part because they move so often. States with Election Day Registration have noticed large surges in youth voting.
- **Historically Disenfranchised Voters** -- Voters who have faced discrimination historically are still among the most likely to face registration errors, often through no fault of their own.
- **Eligible Voters Mistakenly Purged from Voting Rolls** -- Allows them to cast a meaningful ballot.

**EDR counteracts arbitrary voter registration deadlines.** Voter registration deadlines vary from state to state and seem to have little bearing on smooth elections. 28 states close off voter registration 25 or more days before the election – well before the media and the public have given real attention to the races.

**EDR is cost-effective and easier for elections officials to administer than provisional ballots.** Elections are no more expensive to administer in EDR states than in non-EDR states. A 2007 survey of local election officials in EDR states – New Hampshire, Maine, Idaho, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Minnesota describe the incremental cost of EDR as minimal.

Many of us have stories of people turned away from the polls because their names mistakenly did not appear on the rolls on Election Day. After the 2000 presidential election, in which upwards of three million Americans were turned away from the polls because of voter registration problems and registry flaws, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act. As a non-SameDay Registration state we are required to offer provisional ballots to those citizens arriving at the polls who believe they are registered but whose names do not appear on registration rolls. As described by Demos, “the use of provisional ballots, though, doesn’t ensure that every vote will count. In 2008, 2 million provisional ballots were again cast; only 1.44 million were counted. Connecticut *rejected* over 62 percent of provisional ballots cast in that presidential election, a reverse of the national average (nationwide, 61.8 percent of all provisional ballots were *counted* in full).”<sup>1</sup>

Allowing eligible voters to register and vote on the same day would cut down on the need to vote by provisional ballot, and save voters from the fear that their votes won’t count. In states that adopted Election Day Registration there was a dramatic reduction in provisional balloting – potentially saving costs.

Details from Iowa and North Carolina, states with Same Day Registration, show a reduction in the post-election process of verifying registrations and/ or sending notifications to those whose votes were not counted – a time-consuming and expensive task for Voter Registrars. This would also cut down on voter frustration at the polls and problems for voluntary poll workers.

**Election Day Registration does not encourage voter fraud.** A recent analysis of 2002 – 2005 data from EDR states found very little evidence of voter fraud. And the great majority of local elections officials participating in EDR states rated current fraud-prevention measures sufficient to protect the integrity of elections.

**Election Day Registration can be a secure and easy way to register voters, and one that can dramatically improve turnout rates** as proposed in this legislation. Connecticut could potentially benefit from 10 point increase in voter participation and make it one of the states with the highest voter turnout in the country.

We all witnessed the remarkable turnout in the last Presidential election. Even more remarkable than voters lining up to exercise their right to vote on Election Day were the 40 million voters who voted before Election Day. This translates to thirty percent of the total voting! Colorado had the highest early voter turnout at 79.3%; Pennsylvania had the lowest at 4.1%. **Common Cause supports early in-person voting.**

**In addition we support Online Voter Registration as a way to streamline election administration and a way to increase participation of young people.** In order to modernize our election system to respond to our increasingly electronically connected age we agree that we must ensure that secure online voter registration is available as recommended in this bill

This strategy captures and transmits an electronic copy of the voter's signature in a secure manner. The data show we can increase participation, maintain efficient and accurate elections without increased administrative burden and without voter fraud.

Common Cause supports **HB 5022 An Act Increasing Penalties for Voter Intimidation and Interference.** This is an important recognition of the significant challenges that certain voters may face. I am proud that Connecticut is a leader in opposition to unnecessarily restrictive ID and proof-of-citizenship requirements. Our state is taking steps to improve the security of elections without compromising our citizens' right to vote.

Studies show that as many as 11 percent of eligible voters do not have government-issued photo ID. That percentage is even higher for seniors, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income voters, and students. Many citizens find it hard to get government photo IDs, because the underlying documentation like birth certificates (the ID one needs to get ID) is often difficult or expensive to come by. At the same time, voter ID policies are far more costly to implement than many assume. 3&4

We urge the Committee to vote this important anti-voter suppression bill out and commend the Governor for his leadership on this issue.

Finally, Common Cause supports **Governor's House Joint Resolution No. 2: Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution.** This is an important modernization of our law to put decisions about precinct based or non-precinct based voting in the hands of the General Assembly.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the GAE committee today.

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1. Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action, Election Day Registration: A Ground Level View (November 2007), [http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR\\_Clerks.pdf](http://www.demos.org/pubs/EDR_Clerks.pdf).
2. Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action, Election Day Registration: Voters Win with Election Day Registration (Winter 2009).
3. Brennan Center for Justice: Voter ID (via web), [http://www.brennancenter.org/content/section/category/voter\\_id](http://www.brennancenter.org/content/section/category/voter_id)
4. Brennan Center for Justice: Weiser, Gaskins & Iyer, "Citizens Without Proof", (September, 2011).

**Appendix to Testimony of Secretary of the State Denise Merrill on House Bill 5022, "AN ACT INCREASING PENALTIES FOR VOTER INTIMIDATION AND INTERFERENCE"**

**Penalties for Improperly Influencing a Voter**

<b>Connecticut Felony &amp; Misdemeanor Penalties</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Fine</b>	<b>Imprisonment</b>
Class A felony	Up to \$20,000	10-25 years
Class B felony	Up to \$15,000	1-20 years
Class C felony	Up to \$10,000	1-10 years
Class D felony	Up to \$5000	1-5 years
Class A misdemeanor	Up to \$2000	Up to 1 year
Class B misdemeanor	Up to \$1000	Up to 6 months
Class C misdemeanor	Up to \$500	Up to 3 months

<b>Connecticut Penalties for Improperly Influencing Voters – Current &amp; Suggested</b>					
<b>Crime</b>	<b>Current Fine</b>	<b>Current Imprisonment</b>	<b>Suggested Fine</b>	<b>Suggested Imprisonment</b>	<b>Suggested Classification</b>
9-363. Circulating false or misleading voting instructions	Up to \$500	Up to 5 years	Up to \$5000	1-5 years	Class D felony
9-364. Influencing Elector to Refrain from Voting	Up to \$500	3 months to 1 year	Up to \$2000	Up to 1 year	Class A misdemeanor
9-364a. Acts prohibited (threat of force, force, bribery, etc. to influence voting)	Up to \$1000	Up to 1 year	Up to \$10,000	1-10 years	Class C felony
9-365. Employer threats	\$100-\$500	6-12 months	Up to \$2000	Up to 1 year	Class A misdemeanor
9-366. Tampering with ballots	None	Up to 5 years	Up to \$10,000	Up to 10 years	Class C Felony