

EDR, No Excuse Absentee Ballots, Voter Intimidation

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CONNECTICUT
STATE COUNCIL

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

Co-Chairs Senator Slossberg and Representative Morin, and distinguished members of the GAE Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in favor of bills, 5024, 5022, and Joint resolution No. 2. My name is Paul Filson and I am Director of the Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council. SEIU represents over 55,000 members, and is the largest in Connecticut.

SEIU is an organization that participates vigorously in our state's democracy and electoral system. The union is constantly engaged in registering our members to vote and educating them on electoral issues. On election-day we have had as many as 500 members volunteer to knock on doors and make calls to get out the vote. There is nothing more frustrating than finding a member or one of their family members at home on election-day without a current registration.

If Connecticut could join the 8 other states that have Election Day Registration then everyone interested in voting could vote. SEIU believes in making voting as easy and as expansive as possible. It is often workers, and the working poor, who must work several jobs to make ends meet, who neglect to make time to keep their registrations current. My own experience, going door to door in Bridgeport, confirmed that residents there change residences quite frequently and that they often forget to update their registrations. Registration laws from the past are out of date and prevent many from participating in our democracy. The state-wide centralized computerized registration system will allow for a fair and secure Election Day registration system.

SEIU has long advocated for an early voting system. Early voting would allow for a longer and more effective get out the vote campaign – thus upping turnout, especially in non-presidential year elections, and expanding our democracy. SEIU was very much involved in working for Oregon's mail ballot system which has been successful in raising turnout and getting more people involved in the electoral process. Anecdotally, colleagues I work with from Oregon report that people like the convenience of voting by mail. Voters in Oregon also like being able to say "I already voted – leave me alone". A no excuse absentee ballot system, I believe, was used in Oregon before they actually instituted their vote by mail system. Let's make voting easier in Connecticut by allowing for a no excuse absentee ballot and allowing more people to vote by mail and to vote early.

Finally, SEIU in CT has occasionally witnessed real voter suppression/intimidation campaigns – especially in urban areas. Increasing penalties may give pause to those cynical operatives who try and subvert democracy to win elections.

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