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Emily Trudeau  
CT Bar Association Military and Veterans Affairs Committee

**In SUPPORT of HB 6111**  
**AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIFORM MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS ACT**

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Members of the Connecticut Legislature, Thank you.

My name is Emily Trudeau and I serve as a member of the Connecticut Bar Association Military and Veteran's Affairs Committee. I

For six years, I was a member of the United States Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps, serving in Washington, D.C., Sadr City, Iraq, Yokosuka, Japan, and Little Creek, Virginia. All this time, I remained a Connecticut resident.

I was fortunate that that town of Wallingford always provided me an absentee ballot on time. However, my experiences as a command voting assistance officer painted a different picture. I witnessed service members receiving ballots days after the election had ended. Service members receiving ballots that were so illegible they were impossible to fill in. Service members who had their ballots returned as undeliverable due to any number of administrative failings. Each such incident left the service member disenfranchised, disheartened, and ultimately disillusioned in the fairness of the voting system. Overseas in particular, entire commands were infected with the low morale resulting from the belief that despite their sacrifices for the rights and liberties of others, their own votes didn't matter.

Such sentiments grew worse when media reports of bags of ballots being left behind in warehouses, or returned for "improper post marks" or other such disqualifications made their way to the units. It was difficult, in light of these experiences, and these reports, to convince the members of my own commands to trust the system and to continue to vote.

These anecdotes are consistent with the results of government surveys which routinely find that although U.S. military personnel are slightly more likely to have registered to vote than the general U.S. population, the voter participation rate among the military is dramatically less than that of the general population. Furthermore, only a minority of overseas and military voters who request an absentee ballot actually returned one. Meanwhile, a disproportionate number of military ballots continue to be rejected.

This bill is a long overdue step in bringing oversight and consistency to the military voting system. Again, I was fortunate. But the right to vote should not be dependent on luck, or the arbitrary benevolence of individual municipalities. It is a fundamental right.

I remind you all that the service member sheds many of his or her first amendment rights in order to defend the rights of others. We cannot comment publicly or engage in political debate, pro or con. Our only authorized form of political speech is through the vote.

Any legislation that helps ensure that right is not only available, but meaningful should have this state's strongest endorsement. Thank you.