



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.

**CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee**

**February 25, 2013 Public Hearing**

**Comments provided by: Susan Voris, Election Laws Specialist, League of Women Voters of Connecticut**

**Support for: HJ 36 – Resolution Approving An Amendment to the State Constitution to Grant Increased Authority to the General Assembly Regarding Election Administration.**

My name is Susan Voris. I am the Election Laws Specialist for the League of Women Voters of Connecticut. As a state-wide organization with over 1600 members, the League is dedicated to improving the electoral process.

During the 2012 session, the General Assembly passed HJ 2 – Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow For No-Excuse Absentee Voting. HJ 2 became Resolution Act No. 12-1. This was the first step in a process. Since a super majority did not pass HJ2, a similar bill passed by a majority during second consecutive year is required to become a constitutional question on the November 2014 ballot. Changing the Constitution to amend the electoral process is a cumbersome endeavor. The League believes that the Connecticut Constitution should acknowledge the elections; however, we also believe the General Assembly should make the laws regarding elections.

Referring to Section 1 of the resolution to amend Section 7 of Article Sixth of the Constitution, the League supports measures which assure that absentee ballot privileges are available to all electors - for any reason. The Connecticut Constitution and current law limit the use of an absentee ballots to a handful of specific electors including those who will be out of town during the election, the sick and disabled, those whose religious tenets prohibit them from going to the polling place and election workers who may be working at a polling place other than their own. It penalizes other electors who may in fact benefit most from using these ballots such as first responders, commuters, family caregivers or the parents of young children. A first responder, who works in the same community where he lives, may be on duty and unable to make it to the polls. A commuter by the letter of the law must be outside the town limits before 6 a.m. and not return until after 8 p.m. in order to qualify for an absentee ballot. A late train or an accident on the highway could make that commuter late in returning to his community. A caregiver for a sick or disabled family member who qualifies for an absentee ballot, cannot seek his or her own absentee ballot and must find a substitute caregiver or give up his or her right to vote in an election. While these voters may have the intent to make it to the polls, their situations can be unpredictable; under current absentee ballot rules, their right to vote may be denied to them. The law's intent should be to increase voter participation, not disenfranchise our electors by putting up obstacles to voting.

Passage of HJ 36 and approval of the amendment by the electorate would remove the restrictions on absentee ballots from the Connecticut Constitution and allow the legislature to determine the rules for absentee ballots including extending absentee ballot privileges to all electors. The General Assembly should recognize that absentee ballots have been used

in Connecticut for many years and the process is well established. The League urges the Committee to support HJ 36 and encourages continued strong measures and strict penalties to ensure there is no undue influence or voter fraud in the use of these ballots.

In reference to Section 2 to amend Section 4 of Article Fourth of the Constitution and Section 3 to amend Section 9 of Article Third of the Constitution, the League supports the language changes that continue to support transparency in election reporting. We believe that the elimination of a time line for the punctual submission of election results is prudent because those time lines are dictated under the state statutes. We believe the removal of these time lines is consistent with the removal of the restrictions for absentee ballots in Section 1 and gives our elected representatives the option to debate appropriate time lines under the state statutes.

The League urges the Committee to support HJ 36.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.