



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 5818, An Act Extending the Hours of Election Day Registration and House Bill 6045, An Act Concerning Election Day and Primary Day Registration

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is David McGuire, and I am executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5818, An Act Extending the Hours of Election Day Registration and House Bill 6045, An Act Concerning Election Day and Primary Day Registration.

As an organization committed to the liberties guaranteed by our Constitution, the ACLU-CT strongly supports a free and fair voting system to uphold the foundational cornerstone of our democracy: the right to vote. We therefore support these measures, which would provide more people with the opportunity to participate in elections in Connecticut.

We support liberty, justice, and equality for all, including equal access to the ballot box. By providing more people with the chance to make their voices heard, Election Day registration and Primary Day registration uphold these critical democratic principles. Turning Election Day and Primary Day registrants away from voting, however, reduces the number of Connecticut residents who can vote and weakens our democracy. It disproportionately harms minorities, immigrants, the poor, and people who live in cities.

To be clear, we believe that current Connecticut law already allows anyone in line to register to vote by 8 p.m. on Election Day to cast a ballot that day. As there was confusion around this issue in the 2018 general election in our state and the Secretary of the State issued incorrect guidance to registrars in 2016, however, it is clear that Connecticut law would benefit from the additional clarity that House Bill 5818 would provide.

In November 2018, New Haven poll workers instituted an 8 p.m. cutoff for voting, prohibiting many people who were in line to register to vote on Election Day by 8 p.m. from voting. However, Connecticut's Election Day registration law is clearly intended to allow people who are in line to register to vote by 8 p.m. to cast their ballots that same day. In November 2016, 30,000 people in Connecticut registered to vote on Election Day. Despite being in line to register by 8 p.m., many people were turned away from the polls, unable to cast their ballots. News reports, for instance, cited at least 50 people in New Haven who were in line to register to vote by 8 p.m. but were turned away, and a similar number in Meriden.

House Bill 6045 would allow people in Connecticut to both register to vote and enroll in a political party that is holding a primary on a Primary Day. Allowing people to register to vote on the day of an election has proven to increase voter turnout. Increasing the number of voters is particularly important in primary elections because there are fewer voters participating than in other elections. Allowing people to register to vote on the day of primary elections may also decrease the number of people using Election Day registration for regular elections.

Passing this bill would put Connecticut in line with other states that have strengthened their voter registration laws. Ten states, including the nearby Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, allow Election Day registration on primary days.

There are many good reasons why someone would need to register to vote on Election Day and Primary Day. These voters deserve an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. I urge you to support both House Bill 5818 and House Bill 6045.