

March 13, 2019

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HJ 161: RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING**

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Flexer and Representative Fox, Vice-Chairs Senator Haskell and Representative Winkler, Ranking Members Senator Sampson and Representative France, and Distinguished Members of the GAE Committee,

My name is Paula Bacolini, I have lived in Glastonbury, CT for more than 30 years. As a volunteer, I lead several grassroots groups devoted to voting: Democracy Awakens CT - Voting Rights Team, Let People Vote Team in Glastonbury, Glastonbury Huddle, and I am one of the State Coordinators for Make Voting Easy along with other grassroots leaders and organizations throughout CT. In addition, as a member of several grassroots organizations in CT, I am working for voting rights and other important legislative issues. I am submitting testimony in support of:

**HJ 161: RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING**

In 2017 and 2018, the CT House passed similar legislation, an amendment proposing an early voting period, but in both sessions the bills did not come to the floor of the Senate for a vote. I want to thank this Committee for voting these amendments out of committee in previous sessions and I am again testifying to urge you to pass HJ 161 out of the committee.

HJ 161 would make it possible to have a period of at least 3 days of in person Early Voting prior to Election Day, and pave the way for No-Excuse Absentee Voting. In a 2016 Gallop poll, 80% of Americans, 74% of Republicans, 80% of Independents and 85% of Democrats support early voting. Support is gaining in CT too.

As our population ages, this would be particularly beneficial to families and your constituents of all ages. An otherwise healthy individual or their family member may be taken ill on or just before Election Day, and the voter would miss the opportunity to vote. Early voting affords more flexibility for families.

I have experienced this first hand as a retiree, with my own personal health problems, especially with inclement weather, as a caretaker of my own mother who lived in New York, and needed me as she was not well. More recently in 2016 as a mother, when I needed to quickly leave CT to be with my daughter in New York, when she underwent surgery. In the midst of packing, I had to stop at the Town Hall to complete an absentee ballot. If there were more than one day to cast my vote it would have made it easier to vote, and it would have alleviated an already stressful situation. I am not alone, so many people want No-Excuse Absentee Voting, but are prevented, due to the constrictions in the CT Constitution.

More people will be engaged in the political process if Early Voting is enacted, and long lines at the polls will be reduced, alleviating the stresses on poll workers enabling them to solve problems as they occur. Early Voting and No-Excuse Voting enables all eligible voters to cast a ballot, and will strengthen our democracy.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, some form of in person Early Voting is currently the law in 39 states and the District of Columbia. It was just signed into law, in January 2019, in New York State.

So far this year our **petition to the CT General Assembly has a total of 956 signatures from CT voters residing in 95 cities and towns across the state, who are in favor of Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting (please see list below)**. This is a huge increase since last year when we began collecting signatures. When I testified last session, we had only 168 signatures from CT voters in only 50 cities and towns.

The number of CT voters in favor of Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting has increased significantly, and the number of cities and towns they come from has doubled. People are telling their legislators that they want more convenient access to voting, just like the 40 other jurisdictions have throughout our country.

HJ 161, the Resolution to Amend the CT Constitution to allow Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting is not asking legislators to support or oppose this legislation, but instead to vote Yes to give your constituents the opportunity to weigh in and let you know their preference on a ballot question referendum. In this way, all Connecticut voters have a chance to let all their Senators and Representatives know how they feel about Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting. This is truly the democratic process. It is non-partisan. No matter what party you belong to, legislators have constituents who want to vote for them, but due to circumstances beyond their control they cannot or do not vote, because of the constraints and responsibilities of their lives in our society today.

I urge all the members of the GAE Committee to support HJ 161, and unanimously vote this resolution out of the committee. It was favored in past sessions, and deserves a vote in both houses of the Connecticut General assembly in the 2019 session. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Paula Bacolini  
Glastonbury, CT  
Coordinator, Make Voting Easy  
Democracy Awakens CT - Voting Rights Team  
Let People Vote Team  
Glastonbury Huddle

Please see list below of Petitioners' from 95 Cities and Towns that support Early Voting.

**956 PETITION SIGNERS FROM THESE 95 CT CITIES AND TOWNS are in favor of HJ 161:  
RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR  
EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING**

**This petition will be delivered to the CT General Assembly, during the 2019 session.**

Avon	Fairfield	New Haven	Stamford
Burlington	Glastonbury	New London	Stratford
Branford	Granby	New Milford	Suffield
Bridgeport	Greenwich	North Branford	Tarriffville
Brookfield	Groton	Northford	Trumbull
Chester	Guilford	North Windham	Unionville
Cornwall	Hampton	Naugatuck	Wallingford
Bethel	Hartford	Newington	Warren
Bethlehem	Harwinton	Old Saybrook	Washington
Bloomfield	Hamden	Orange	Washington Depot
Bolton	Ivoryton	Putnam	Waterbury
Bridgeport	Kent	Ridgefield	Watertown
Bridgewater	Killingworth	Rocky Hill	West Cornwall
Brookfield	Litchfield	Redding	West Hartford
Canaan	Madison	Roxbury	West Haven
Chester	Manchester	Salem	West Simsbury
Colchester	Marlborough	Sandy Hook	Weston
Coventry	Meriden	Shelton	Wethersfield
Cromwell	Middletown	Sherman	Willimantic
Danbury	Milford	Simsbury	Windham
East Hampton	Morris	Southbury	Windsor
East Hartford	Naugatuck	Southington	Woodbury
Essex	New Britain	South Glastonbury	Woodstock Valley
Farmington	New Fairfield	South Kent	