

**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
COMMON CAUSE IN CONNECTICUT
IN SUPPORT OF HJRES 161 “A RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO
THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING
AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING”
THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 13, 2019***

Last November, the United States saw record turnout for a midterm election. While this result is on its face a significant achievement, it seems decidedly less so when we recognize that still only half of the voting-eligible population cast a ballot—an estimated 50.3 percent according to the United States Election Project.¹ To be sure, this represents a marked improvement over the last midterm election in 2014, when only 36.7 percent of eligible voters participated.²

Connecticut has fared just slightly better than the country as a whole, with 54.4 per cent turnout in 2018 and 42.3 percent in 2014.³

As citizens of a nation whose constitutional system is based on representative democracy, we can and must increase participation in the work of self-governance. As members of the Board of Directors of Common Cause of Connecticut, we believe that Connecticut should help lead the way by expanding access to the ballot in the Constitution State.

The General Assembly should start by passing **HJRes161 – A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitutional to Allow for Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting**. If the General Assembly passes this resolution with 75 percent of the vote in this legislative session or with majority support in two consecutive sessions, this resolution, subject to subsequent ratification by a majority of Connecticut voters, would amend the state constitution to allow early voting and no-excuse absentee ballot. Connecticut could then join the 39 other states that provide for some form of early voting.⁴ Given that early voting is already available in nearly eighty percent of states, it is no surprise that early voting has broad bipartisan support. According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2018, 71 percent of Americans favored allowing early voting or no-excuse absentee voting, including 83 percent of Democrats and 57 percent of Republicans.

In Connecticut, both Gov. Ned Lamont and the Republican gubernatorial nominee Bob Stefanowski expressed support for early voting in the state. Responding to a question in an Oct. 30 gubernatorial debate, Ned Lamont said he was in favor of early voting. He reiterated his support in his inaugural address, saying Connecticut needs to remedy the problem of long lines of people waiting to vote at polling places.

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¹ *2018 November General Election Turnout Rates*, UNITED STATES ELECTION PROJECT, <http://www.electproject.org/2018g>.

² *2014 November General Election Turnout Rates*, UNITED STATES ELECTION PROJECT, <http://www.electproject.org/2014g>.

³ *2018 November General Election Turnout Rates*, UNITED STATES ELECTION PROJECT; *id.*

⁴ *State Laws Governing Early Voting*, NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (Jan. 25, 2019), <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/early-voting-in-state-elections.aspx>.

For his part, candidate Stefanowski said, “I think early voting, properly verified, makes a ton of sense. Anything we can do to increase the participation rate would be good.”⁵

Recognizing this bipartisan consensus, lawmakers in Connecticut should work together to pass this resolution with the requisite 75 percent during this term and send the measure to voters for their approval in 2020.

Early voting has broad support from the public because voters benefit from and take advantage of expanded access to the polls. According to a 2008 political science study, early voting can increase turnout by 2 to 4 percent.⁶ When combined with same-day registration and Election Day registration, which Connecticut already allows, early voting can increase by an even larger factor—from 4.2 to 11 percent.⁷ And in a 2018 survey of 900 New York voters, 79 percent said they would be more likely to vote if the state offered early voting, which it passed this year.⁸ The citizens of Connecticut should have that same opportunity.

Aside from the prospects for expanding participation, allowing citizens who already regularly vote to cast a ballot early would provide tremendous flexibility and convenience that our current system in which we vote on a single Tuesday in November cannot possibly offer. The desirability of this reform is reflected by the fact that at least 42 million people voted early nationwide in the 2016 election.⁹ Early voting would make participating easier and provide incentives for new voters to go to the polls.

Allowing early voting in Connecticut would expand access to the ballot and increase voter participation. Let’s empower Connecticut voters by passing **HJRes161**.

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⁵ Russell Blair, *Why Doesn't Connecticut Have Early Voting?*, HARTFORD COURANT (Oct. 31, 2018), <https://www.courant.com/politics/hc-pol-hearken-stefanowski-lamont-early-voting-20181031-story.html>.

⁶ Paul Gronke et al., *Convenience Voting*, 11 ANNUAL REVIEW OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 437 (2008), http://earlyvoting.net/files/2012/05/Gronke2008-Convenience_Voting.pdf.

⁷ Barry C. Burden et al., *Election Laws, Mobilization, and Turnout*, paper prepared for presentation at the 2010 Chicago Area Behavior Workshop (University of Wisconsin Madison, 2010), <http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~jnd260/cab/CAB2010%20-%20Burden.pdf>.

⁸ Carl Campanile, *More New Yorkers Would Vote If Elections Were on a Weekend*,” NEW YORK POST (Apr. 30, 2018), <https://nypost.com/2018/04/30/more-new-yorkers-would-vote-if-elections-were-on-a-weekend/>.

⁹ Tara Golshan, *Where Early Voting Stands Going into Election Day*, VOX (Nov. 7, 2016), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/7/13541612/where-early-voting-stands-election-day>.

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