

March 13, 2019

Testimony of Amber F. McReynolds in Support of HJR 161:

Moving to “No Excuse” Absentee voting in Connecticut

1. I am providing this testimony both in my personal capacity - as an expert in the field of election administration - and currently as Executive Director for the National Vote At Home Institute, a nonprofit nonpartisan organization which is focused on improving the voting experience for voters across the country and implementing convenient voting options to include effective ballot delivery systems (commonly known as ballots by mail) along with in-person voting options.
2. I was qualified as an expert witness in the field of election administration, in the Civil Action No. 17-02016 (RC), U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (2017) and Gessler v. Johnson, 2011CV6588, Denver District Court (2013). I also provided amicus curiae testimony in the recent Georgia case 1:18 – cv – 04776-LMM Martin, Bowers et al v. Kemp.
3. Until August 15, 2018, I was the Elections Director for the City and County of Denver, Colorado. I administered elections in Denver for 13 years and have worked in public policy and administration for over 16 years. I served as the Director of Elections for the past 7 years, Deputy Director of Elections from 2008 to 2011, and Operations Manager/Coordinator from 2005-2008. Denver has approximately 500,000 registered voters and conducts 2-4 elections each year. The elections include municipal general and municipal run-off, school board, special district, primary, general, presidential. The State of Colorado conducts all federal and state elections by mail ballot.
4. My relevant educational and professional background is as follows:
 - a. Masters of Science – Comparative Politics, London School of Economics & Political Science, 2002
 - b. Bachelor of Arts – Political Science and Speech Communications, University of Illinois, 2001Professional Certifications:

- a. Certified Elections/Registration Administrator (CERA), Election Center (2010 – Present)
 - b. Certified Colorado Election Official (2007 – Present)
5. In my role as the Director of Elections in Denver, I focused on continual process improvement which includes implementing innovative solutions to improve the voter’s experience. During my tenure, the Denver Elections Division earned national awards from the Election Center and the National Association of Counties for Ballot TRACE (a first-in-the-nation ballot tracking, reporting, and communication engine), iAPP (iPad Accessibility Pilot Project), and eSign (a first-in-the-nation Digital Petition and Voter Registration Drive Application). Denver has also been recognized by the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies and received International Electoral Awards for Ballot TRACE and eSign. In addition, the Denver Elections Division has released other innovative solutions including the Denver Votes mobile application, enhanced contextual and behavioral marketing strategies to encourage civic engagement, interactive customer service platforms and implemented a new voting system in 2015.

Rationale for supporting HJR 161

HJR 161 bill has my full support, and I recommend it receive yours for the following reasons:

1. It is good for voters
2. It is good for elections officials
3. It is good for democracy

Good for Voters

Today in Connecticut, voters must provide an excuse to have their ballot delivered to them and vote “absentee.” This places the State squarely in the back of the pack of current policy nationally, as only 18 states still require an excuse to vote absentee, and only 11 do so with no waiver for voters over 60 or 65. Similar numbers exist for the few states not allowing for early in-person voting (EIPV).

However, there is clear forward movement to put the old policies of “excuse required” absentee voting in the rearview mirror. In November, Michigan voters passed Measure 3 by a 2 to 1 margin, which included moving to what they call “no reason absentee.” The New York State legislature just passed a statute that will take the state to no excuse absentee plus EIPV along the same path as Connecticut

VOTE HOME

would require. There are similar bills under consideration this session in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. New Jersey recently took a step beyond no excuse absentee to offer its voters a permanent absentee list. And Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont already offer “no excuse” absentee.

The benefit to voters is they do not have to know (or pretend to know) what their personal circumstances will be on an Election Day in the future. They do not have to worry that somehow, if those circumstances change between when they apply for a mailed-out ballot and Election Day, that they can be called out for “making a false statement.” What they will know, is that whatever happens, they will have a ballot in their hands and be able to cast their vote. Or, in the case of EIPV, they will have multiple opportunities to cast their vote rather than being confined to one day within a fixed time window.

Good for Elections Officials

Today in Connecticut, elections officials and administrators must process absentee ballot requests containing approved excuses. In theory, those officials should be tracking the reasons cited by voters, and at some point, verifying their legitimacy. Otherwise, what is the point of the exercise?

Practically, of course this rarely if ever happens in Connecticut or most other states still living with “excuse required” policies. So, elections officials in Connecticut’s towns are being asked to handle an administrative duty for no apparent reason.

The passage of HJR 161 would free the clerks and registrars to focus on areas where their expertise and attention were warranted to better improve the voting experience.

Good for democracy

Anything that reduces friction in the process of elections tends to increase voter engagement and turnout. And allowing voters to not have to understand and then come up with an appropriate excuse clearly reduces friction.

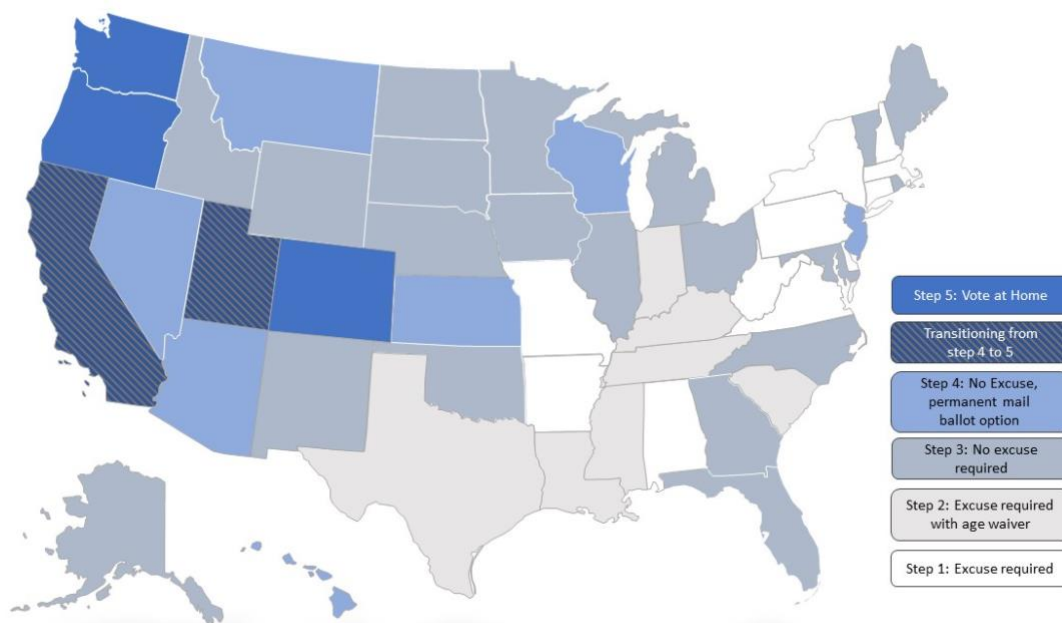
Under separate cover, we understand you have been provided a copy of a comprehensive study the National Vote at Home Institute recently prepared for the State of Connecticut as you consider improving access to the ballot by instituting better “vote by mail” policies. We encourage those interested to review it, as it provides a much broader set of reference materials than we will here. It can be

viewed/downloaded at: <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Voting-by-Mail-Report-Pursuant-to-CT-EO-64.pdf>

In the meantime, here are a few of the most relevant elements of that report:

First, here is a map showing which states support which of five basic categories of mailed-out ballots. Connecticut is at Step 1 today.

Mailed ballot access policies – December 2018



Next, compare that map to the one below showing voter turnout in the 2018 mid-terms (updated from the EO 64 report). Notice how much turnout correlates with higher availability of mailed-out ballots, independent of whatever local election issues / enthusiasm there might have been in any particular state.

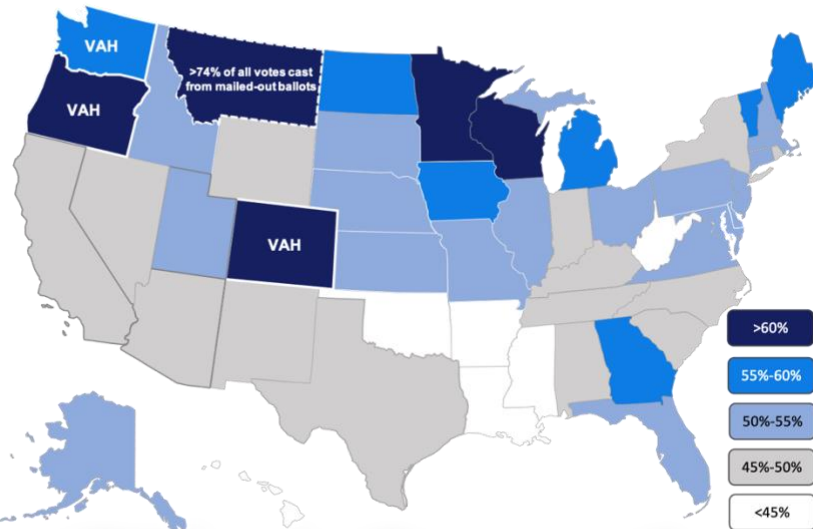
Note: VAH stands for the three 100% mailed-out ballot states (CO, OR, WA). But the “no excuse absentee” states of Minnesota, Montana, Wisconsin and Maine witnessed similar impact by having more voters with their ballot in hand.

2018 Mid-term Election Turnout

Bold solid outlines are VAH states

Ranking by % turnout

- #1: MN – 64.2%
- #2: CO – 63.0% (VAH)
- #3: MT – 62.0%
- #4: WI – 61.7%
- #5: OR – 61.5% (VAH)
- #6: ME – 60.2%
- #7: WA – 58.9% (VAH)

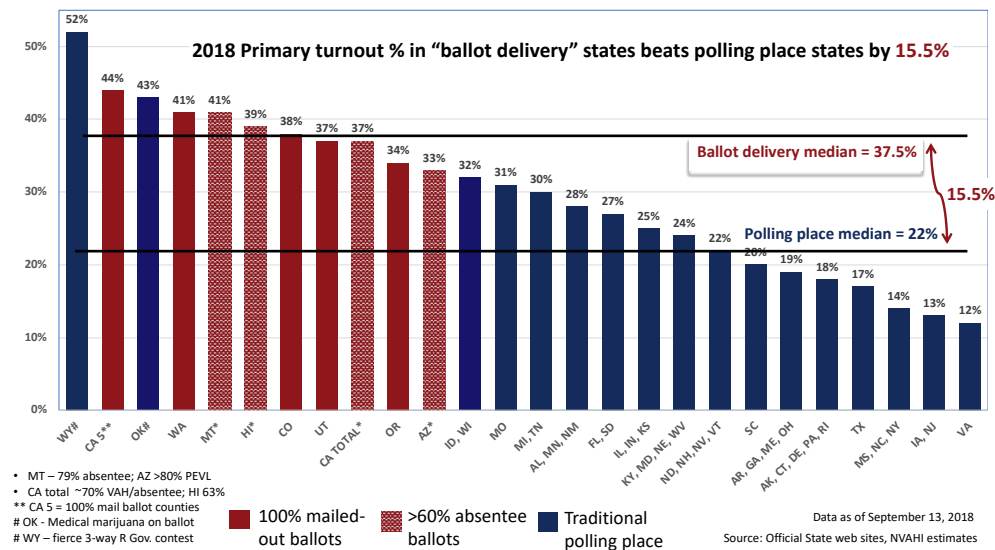


For consistency, all data uses voting eligible population (VEP) as basis for % calculation

Data as of 1/1/2019
Sources: The US Election Project, State web sites, NVAHI estimates

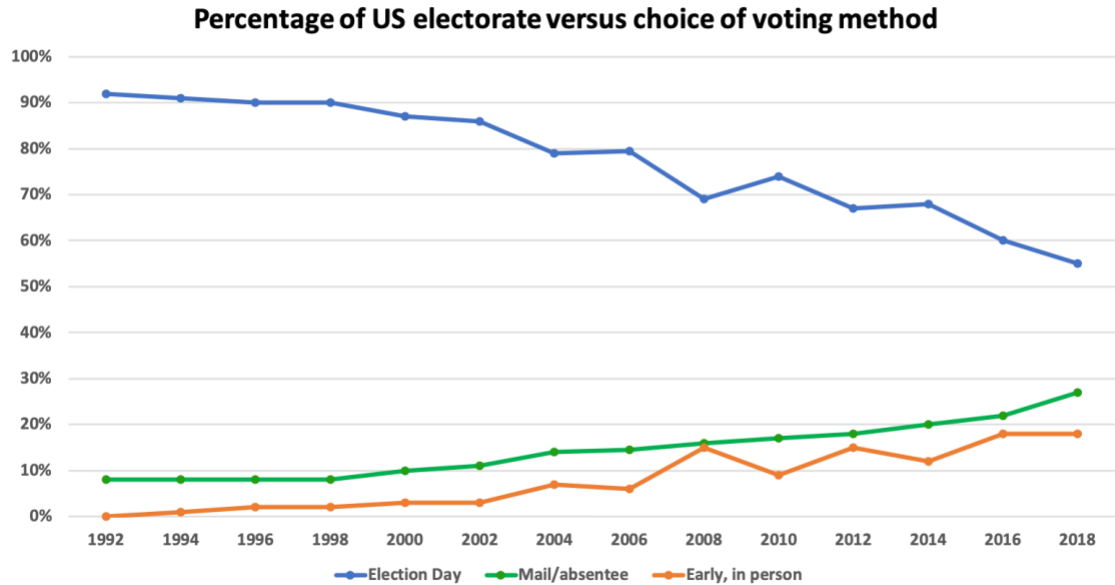
Additionally, below is a chart showing voter turnout in the 2018 primaries. You will note that states with a majority of their voters casting ballots they received by mail demonstrated a 15% point higher median turnout. Lower friction absentee policies drive higher engagement in these “non-general” elections with even more impact in local and special elections.

Connecticut was well below the “polling place-centric” median at ~18%, and about a factor of two below the majority mailed-out ballot cohort of 37.5%.



Finally, the graphic below (updated to 2018 from the EO 64 report) shows which voting methods voters are choosing nationally. Mail ballot voting and EIPV voting are growing rapidly. With the passage of HJR 161, Connecticut can give its voters the opportunity to take advantage of this trend.

Voting at Home (VAH) is growing steadily, and exceeds early in-person voting (EIPV)
By 2022, fewer than 50% of all ballots will be cast in-person on Election Day



Sources: 1992-2016:: MIT Election Lab. 2018: PEW Research

Putting in place a no excuse absentee option and early in person voting for voters aligns Connecticut with the national trend towards a majority of ballots being cast other than in a traditional voting booth on Election Day.

Connecticut would join the majority of states that have already adopted these policies.

Putting voters first, as HJR 161 will do, is both the right thing, and the timely thing to do.