

March 12, 2019

Testimony for the Government Administration and Elections Committee

Support for H.J.R. 161, RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING; and

Support for S.B. 1050, AN ACT CONCERNING RANKED-CHOICE VOTING FOR ELECTIONS

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

I am Susan Miller from Windsor. I am writing today in support of both S.B. 1050 and H.J. 161. Both of these bills work to strengthen our most basic democratic right – that of the right to vote for candidates of our choosing.

Support H.J.R. 161

The state constitution explicitly states that voters “appear on Election Day” unless they meet one of the requirements for an absentee ballot. That constitutional language makes it necessary to pass an amendment before Connecticut can pass an early voting law. Our current approach of requiring people to vote only on election day without a valid excuse is not equitable. Many people work multiple jobs and cannot afford to take the time needed to drive to a polling place, which may be far from where they work, and stand in line to vote. This disenfranchisement hurts our towns and state by not reflecting the will of the people. The current approach also hurts our elderly. Having cared for elderly parents I know just how difficult it can be to get out of the house, in spite of best intentions. Having flexibility to vote early would also help them by not having to navigate crowds.

Voting should be easy and made accessible to everyone. That is what we need for a healthy democracy.

Support S.B. 1050

Our current system of voting is quite restrictive. If there are three candidates in a race, for example, I find myself voting for a “safe” pick rather than the person I prefer because I’m afraid that this will split the vote and a third candidate will come out on top. I’m sure there are many people who do the same. If ranked choice was in effect, I would be much more comfortable voting for my preferred candidate, with a second pick of the “safe” choice. In addition, if everyone uses this option my preferred candidate may actually have a chance to win!

Currently in our two party system there is virtually no chance for third party candidates. They end up being shunned as spoilers instead of respected as adding choices. Ranked choice changes the dynamics and makes more options possible. Having options where any candidate can find a path to victory will increase voter participation. People stay home and tune out if they see no path for their candidate.

A vibrant democracy requires citizen engagement. Ranked choice voting will expand citizen engagement and lead to outcomes where the majority of citizens are satisfied with the results. A study to evaluate the concerns around ranked choice in Connecticut just makes sense.

Please support HJR 161 and SB 1050.

Thank you.

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