

March 11, 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

Submitted by:
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Dear Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Daniel J. Fox, and Distinguished Members of the GAE Committee;

My name is Shari Van Ness and I live in Middletown. I am writing today in support of HJ 161: RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING. During the 2018 mid-term election cycle, I volunteered on campaigns in states that already allow early voting. From this experience, I witnessed the benefits of an expanded voting timeframe and became convinced that we need to change the way we vote in Connecticut.

I think many people can understand that the flexibility of early voting will make it easier and more convenient for people to vote. Working on campaigns for elections with early voting, I was struck by a few additional benefits that I was previously unaware of:

- Registration issues: On quite a few occasions, I was told by individuals that they were unable to vote, often due to registration issues such as a recent change of residence. While some of these issues are irrelevant due to Connecticut's same day registration policy, voters often are not aware of this policy. Getting people to think about voting early and asking them to make a voting plan widens the window of time to resolve registration issues. Also, sometimes people are not aware of a registration problem until they attempt to vote. Having an early voting period means if someone is turned away at the poll, they still have time to resolve their issue before Election Day. This also would relieve the one day rush on town registrars to address issues as they arise on Election Day.
- Better informed and engaged voters: While much time and news shines light on major elections such as presidential and gubernatorial, many voters don't start thinking about down ballot races and initiatives until they are faced with a ballot. By allowing for and asking voters to become engaged earlier, we enable voters to become better informed on issues and races that may not be in the forefront on the news. On Get Out the Vote campaigns in other states, I contacted voters to ask them about the logistics of their voting plans. During these discussions, voters often asked questions about candidates and initiatives. Because of the early voting window, I was able to direct them to campaign resources where they could get answers. In some cases, I even put voters in touch with candidates so that they could get answers directly.
- Increased voter energy: When someone votes early, they tell others – their family, friends, co-workers, or even strangers via an "I voted" sticker. This encourages others to vote, especially if they have more than a one-day opportunity to do so. During GOTV campaigns, I also often spoke to people who already voted but suddenly were engaged to get others to do so. They often rallied a group of friends or family and made an event of it or even asked how to get involved in volunteer work similar to what I was doing. I think most people get excited about voting once they actually cast a ballot. An earlier voting opportunity means they get engaged sooner and have opportunity to excite others.

I urge you to vote yes for HJ161 so that voting in Connecticut can be more flexible and more people can become engaged in the voting process. Thank you for your consideration.

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