

Government Administration and Elections Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HJ-161

RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE
CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE

Title: ABSENTEE VOTING.

Vote Date: 3/20/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/13/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government administration and Elections Committee

Co-Sponsors

Rep. Mike Winkler

Rep. Christine Conley

Sen. Derek Slap

Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey

Rep. Josh Elliott

Sen. Will Haskell

Rep. Kate Rotella

Rep. Robin E. Comey

REASONS FOR BILL:

To allow for more opportunities for people to vote by eliminating the excuses required to vote via absentee ballot and to provide for three in-person voting days prior to Election Day.

Substitute language: the substitute language for this bill requires there to be three days of early in-person voting, rather than leaving it discretionary.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Denise Merrill, Secretary of the State of Connecticut: supports this bill. She testified that implementing early voting and no-excuse absentee ballots would ease the lines on Election Day. She stated that 39 states already have some form of early voting, and does not believe

the cost to implement would be significant. She also provided in her testimony language that would require three days of early voting.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative Christine Conley: testified that she is concerned about people who are unable to make it to the polls if they are too busy.

Representative Lucy Dathan: testified and described the difference between voting in Connecticut and voting in California and abroad, and believes that more people will participate in elections with this proposal.

Lorelei O'Hagan, Greenwich RTM Member: testified that with the busy and hectic schedules that people have today, early voting would be beneficial to ensuring a higher voter turnout. She also pointed out that while the election was well managed in Greenwich, with short lines, that didn't appear to be the case in other areas of the state.

Steven Winter, Alder, Ward 21, New Haven: testified that at a recent public hearing in New Haven regarding election issues, multiple people supported early voting as a way to ease the issues that his city has experienced.

Bridgeport Generation Now: testified that they believe that the problems that Bridgeport has had with absentee ballot fraud in the past could be mitigated in part by this resolution. They believe that widespread early voting would give the power back to the people and take it out of the hands of the political power brokers.

Common Cause of CT: testified that early voting enjoys broad bipartisan support, and that this would increase participation by making it easier to vote.

Ingrid Alvarez, Connecticut State Director, Hispanic Federation: testified that they believe that early voting and no-excuse absentee ballots would increase the number of voters among Latinos and people of color, as well as new voters.

Nora Duncan, State Director, AARP: testified that they believe long lines deter people from voting. They also support a minimum of 15 days of early voting for at least four hours each day, and a minimum standard for the number of voting machines available.

Samantha Bell, Public Policy Intern, The Alliance: testified that one of the missions of The Alliance is to encourage more civic participation. She also stated that low income citizens tend to have more chaotic schedules that don't always allow them to get to the polls on Election Day.

Fletcher Fisher, Business Manager of IBEW Local 1228: testified that people in the broadcast industry work long days, especially those who are covering the elections, and are often unable to get to the polls during voting hours. Early voting would make it possible for these workers to vote.

Jan Hochadel, President of AFT Connecticut: testified that early voting would reduce the crowds on Election Day and improve poll worker performance.

Sal Luciano, President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO: testified that early voting would help workers manage their schedules so that they can vote. He also pointed out that Connecticut is one of only seventeen states that don't have employee protection for workers to vote.

Amber McReynolds, Vote at Home: testified that as an expert in elections administration, this bill would be beneficial for voters, elections officials and Democracy. She provided various graphs and statistics that showed the various states that use various forms of mailed out ballots and corresponding voter turnout.

Emily O'Hara and Justin Kaiser, ConnPIRG: testified that there are particular challenges with student voting, and that while their organization had buses from the UConn campus to the polling place, many students were discouraged by the long lines for the buses and at the polling place. They feel that early voting would help encourage more students to vote, and further pointed out that early voting would allow election officials to correct errors that sometimes occur during high volume periods.

Rev. Andrew Osmun, One Standard of Justice: testified that his organization supports adopting standards of early voting that would allow people who have "legal requirements that govern their freedom of movement" to cast their ballots. They also recommend a minimum amount of election equipment available to decrease the long lines.

Yvonne Senturia, Election Law Specialist, League of Women Voters of CT: testified that the League supports maximizing access and participation in voting, and believes that absentee ballots available to all and early in-person voting will help to accomplish this.

Brandon Stephens, Member, Yale College Democrats: testified that the increase of voter turnout is the biggest benefit to early voting. He pointed out that passage of this resolution would especially benefit disabled and elderly voters, and provided statistics on the percentage of both of those populations who voted in the 2016 election.

Tom Swan, Connecticut Citizen Action Group: testified that today's working population have schedules that make voting on one single day difficult, and also pointed out that the Legislature would be able to consider how to implement the new changes.

Garrett Sullivan, Voter Choice CT: testified that he believes an early voting system would allow for more efficient election record keeping by the Registrars of Voters, as well as increase turnout for elections.

Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter: testified that current Connecticut election law makes voting inconvenient, and believes that early in-person voting and no excuse absentee ballot voting would provide more opportunity for voters to cast their ballots. He further pointed out that passage of this resolution would still allow for the Legislature to have some control over costs and locations of polling places.

Lisa Lucarelli Chandler, Glastonbury: testified that the lack of early voting opportunities in Connecticut has affected her family: that she has some health challenges that can prevent her from voting in person on Election Day; that her husband works long hours and doesn't get time off from work to vote; and that her daughter has two young children who was only able to secure a babysitter for a short period and struggled to vote during that time.

Joanne Hayhurst, Lakeville: testified that before the 2018 election, she helped the local registrars of voters register people to vote, and that during that effort, a lot of people asked about voting absentee ballot because of the convenience. She also pointed out that people who work multiple jobs may have difficulty getting to the polling place on one particular day.

Mark Bernacki, Connecticut Town Clerks Association: testified in general support of this bill, but the Association is strongly opposed to no-excuse absentee ballots as a form of early voting. He pointed out that voter disenfranchisement would likely rise as the number of rejected absentee ballots would increase with the additional volume. The Association supports early voting in the form of in-person voting by tabulator.

Also submitting testimony in support were:

Sally Turner, Greenwich
Evelyn Avoglia, Stamford
JoAnne Bauer, Hartford
Dr. Terry Blank, Stamford
Janet Bryant, Glastonbury
Kathleen Callahan, Stratford
Val Chamberlain, Guilford
Ruth Cook, N. Branford
Susan Dahill, Branford
Jennifer Dayton
Jody Dietch, Orange
Mary Doherty, Southbury
Elizabeth Duarte, Groton
Kate Duncan, Greenwich
Lawrence Edwards, Stamford
Christina Fagerstal, New Canaan
Christine Farley, West Hartford
Sarah Ficca, Erik Hluchan, Deep River
Julia Friend, New Haven
Shannon Gale, Guilford
Jill Grieveson, Glastonbury
Philip Hinkes, Every Vote Counts, Yale
Zachary Hoyt, Waterbury
Jackie Kaiko, Stamford
Grace Kane, Madison
Lisa Kelly, Guilford
Jennifer Kleindienst, Middletown
Joan Kranz, Stamford
Leon Levine, Greenwich
Kristin Awsumb Liu, Wallingford
Michelle Lopez, Greenwich
Alyssa MacKenzie, New Canaan
Linnea McCaffrey, Manchester
Holly McGrath, Simsbury

Leslee Asch-Morrison, Old Greenwich
Paula Bacolini, Glastonbury
Gail Berritt, Westport
Suzanne Brown, Yale College Democrats
Kathleen Callahan, Stratford
Chas Catania, Stamford
Mary Consoli, Danbury
Rene' Daguerre-Bradford, West Simsbury, CT
Marta Daniels, Chester
David de Milhau, Greenwich
Carole Dmytryshak, Salisbury
Harold Douglas, New Britain
Jan and Mike Dudek, Sharon
Karen Edwards, Stamford
Sydney Elkhay, Mansfield
Brenda Falusi, Tolland
Patrick Farley, West Hartford
Melinda Fields, Hampton
Tom Fuchs, Milford
Alexis Gevanter, Greenwich
Joanne Hayhurst, Lakeville
Valerie Horseley, Hamden
Harold Jordan, Cheshire
Wendy Kalan, Stamford
Roslyn Kaplan, Stamford
Catherine Kenney, Canton
Nancy Korobkin, Riverside
Terri LaPenta-Duffek, Newington
Pam Liflander, Riverside
Katherine LoBalbo, Greenwich
Janet Luongo, Norwalk
Kate Martin, West Hartford
Tiffani McGinnis, West Hartford
Joan Means, New Haven

Andrew Miano, UConn student
Frances Moulder, Torrington
Patricia Owen, Granby
Sheila Phelan, Cos Cob
Nerlyn Pierson, Greenwich
Julia Regan, Stamford
Saul Roselaar, New Haven
Henry Smith, Yale College Democrats
Brandon Stephens, Yale College Democrats
Rob Sutton, Yale College Democrats
Alisa Trachtenberg, Ridgefield
Sally Turner, Greenwich
Mary von Dorster, Noank
Julie Weaver, West Hartford
Erin Whalen, Southington
Andrew Zehner, New Haven

Susan Miller, Windsor
Diana Neff, Glastonbury
Charles Perosino, Tolland
Lizbeth Piel, Sharon
Beverly Proppen, Orange
Ethan Rodriguez-Torrent, New Haven
Henry Smith, Yale College Democrats
Kenneth Speyer, New Britain
Mara Suttman-Lea, New London
Joanna Swomley, Greenwich
Karen Tracy, Stratford
Shari Van Ness, Middletown
Catherine Weaver, West Hartford
Caroline Webster, North Canaan
Carole Young-Kleinfeld, Wilton

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Luther Weeks, Executive Director, CT VotersCount: testified that although his organization is generally supportive of the concept of early voting, he has some concerns about implementation. He cited that in-person early voting would be very costly, and that the extra security requirements for in-person early voting would delay the election results. In his testimony, he recommended that early voting be conducted as “in person absentee voting” at the municipal clerks’ offices.

Dr. Gayle Alberda, Assistant Professor Politics and Public Administration, Fairfield University: testified about the various methods of early voting and corresponding voter turnout. She stated that “vote by mail” only has a small increase in voter turnout during midterm elections and actually has a decreased voter turnout during presidential elections. She further stated in her testimony that the research for in person early voting shows that there is no increase in voter turnout in any type of election, and actually a decrease in turnout for local elections.

Also submitting testimony in opposition were:

Shawn Cully, Bristol
Joseph Hriczo, Bolton
Michael Mancarella

**Reported by: Melissa Russell
Assistant Clerk**

Date: 3/28/2019