

TESTIMONY OF TOM SWAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CONNECTICUT CITIZEN ACTION GROUP (CCAG)

March 6, 2020

BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

ON

H.B. No. 5410 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN CHANGES TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS

S.B. No. 365 AN ACT CONCERNING ONLINE APPLICATIONS FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS

S.B. No. 367 AN ACT SUBJECTING THE PARTNERSHIP FOR CONNECTICUT, INC. TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND STATE ETHICS CODE

S.B. No. 368 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COUNTING OF INCARCERATED PERSONS FOR PURPOSES OF DETERMINING LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

H.B. No. 5405 AN ACT CONCERNING QUALIFYING CONTRIBUTIONS UNDER THE CITIZENS' ELECTION PROGRAM

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and other members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee my name is Tom Swan and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group. On behalf of our thousands of members statewide I want to thank you for raising various proposals today to strengthen our democracy. I will be offering brief comments on a number of bills today.

The first is H.B. No. 5410 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN CHANGES TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS. We agree with many aspects of this bill. The dependent care, head of party, increased disclosure requirements are all items we strongly support. We also think section 11 is a good proposal to ensure that the program gives candidates who may not be able to self-finance a viable chance. The clause on changes to the handling of complaints is an area that needs to be explored in order to come up with a process that is fair and works.

The second is S.B. No. 365 AN ACT CONCERNING ONLINE APPLICATIONS FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS. We strongly support this commonsense proposal and believe it will make it easier for people to exercise their right to vote.

We also strongly support S.B. No. 367 AN ACT SUBJECTING THE PARTNERSHIP FOR CONNECTICUT, INC. TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND STATE ETHICS CODE. The level of state resources going in demand maximum transparency.

We also support S.B. No. 368 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COUNTING OF INCARCERATED PERSONS FOR PURPOSES OF DETERMINING LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS. This is a basic issue of fairness.

The final bill I want to comment on is H.B. No. 5405 AN ACT CONCERNING QUALIFYING CONTRIBUTIONS UNDER THE CITIZENS' ELECTION PROGRAM. We understand that his bill is a result of peoples' frustration from contributions being rejected and questions whether there is a perverse incentive to reject contributions to pad the programs budget. We are confident this is not the case, but

perception matters. Instead of creating a headache for Treasurers we would propose that SEEC informs the campaigns if a contribution has been rejected. If it is not a significant legal issue, like a straw donation, the campaign can notify the person attempting to contribute that it was rejected and how they can apply on-line for their money back minus a small handling fee. This way candidates do not risk having angry supporters who think their money has been confiscated, Treasurers do not have to deal with multiple transactions that will need to be reconciled and SEEC can have a streamlined way to handle this.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you going forward.