

Public Hearing  
Testimony  
Wednesday, March 17, 2021.

To Co-Chairs Sen. Flexer and Rep. Fox, Vice Chairs Sen. Haskell and Rep. Thomas, Ranking Members Sen. Sampson and Rep. Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to regard my testimony. Listed below are the following bills I would like to provide support, opposition and/or concern to:

**Support for Raised H.B. 5883** – This bill provides an expanded opportunity for the youth of communities to get early, first-hand experience at why voting on the local level is crucial. Coming from a town that does budget referendums and referendums on local issues, the content of these votes can dramatically influence the quality of education for youth between the ages of 16-17, and can have a stronger voice in their community as a whole. And like all other towns, we have local elections that vote in our Board of Education, as well as local offices like Town Council, Planning and Zoning and Zoning Board of Appeals. This is a great opportunity for these individuals to play a role in how they are represented, and hopefully make voting a stronger family affair as well as civic duty.

**Support for Raised H.B. 5320** – Our community recently adopted a permanent commission on persons with disabilities in our community. This is an excellent opportunity for the state to have similar conversations as we are having at the local level to ensure all populations have access to vote safely and smoothly.

**Support for S.B. 183** – As someone who currently serves in a volunteer capacity for Town Council in my community, this past year has clearly shown that given an expansion of accessibility, participation improves greatly. Average participation at public meetings has at least doubled from normal attendance rates across multiple elected or appointed bodies. I concur with comments provided by the FOI Commission that some language could use clarification or be strengthened so interpretation is not allowed to run rampant on terms like “reasonable period of time”, “any materials relevant”, and “to the extent feasible”. I also agree that why general guidelines should be in place for participants to identify themselves, there should be avenues of local oversight for implementation and adopting regulations. Our community did a survey on remote participation for elected/appointed officials pre-Covid 19. I believe it will be re-run to get a new perspective from those officials and perhaps even expanded to get input from residents as remote participants/guests to meetings. So again, I strongly support this bill but encourage clarifying language and consideration for local policies/procedures be allowed.

**Support for S.B. 6205** – I support revisions to absentee voting statutes to ensure absentee voting is more clearly understood and effectively used by residents when needed. Especially as

the state considers moving forward with a constitutional vote to allow no-excuse absentee balloting and potentially early voting practices be put in place as Secretary Merrill has indicated in their testimony and promoted regularly from their offices.

Sincerely,  
Steve Jones  
Tolland, CT