

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-759

AN ACT CONCERNING GENDER NEUTRALITY IN THE STATE

Title: CONSTITUTION.

Vote Date: 3/29/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/10/2021

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill seeks to establish a task force that will review the text of the Connecticut constitution and make recommendations to replace gendered language. By February 1, 2022, the task force is expected to submit a report on its findings and recommendations to the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Upon submission of the report, the task force will terminate.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Shawn T. Wooden, Treasurer, Connecticut State Treasurer: Treasurer Wooden submitted testimony in support of the bill. He emphasized the importance of representation and the impact of words on our own individual biases and expectations. Treasurer Wooden believes that this bill would ensure that our state constitution lives up to the values it promotes.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Luther Weeks, Member of Secular Connecticut: On behalf of Secular Connecticut, Mr. Weeks applauded the efforts to remove gendered language from the state constitution. In addition to removing gendered language, Mr. Weeks would like to see the scope of the commission expanded to include the removal of religious language, and any language that may be at odds with federal law or the United States Constitution. Citing religious language in the state constitution and the requirement that Connecticut General Assembly members be

sworn in on a religious oath, Mr. Weeks believes it is long past time to make the constitution and our state government free from religion.

Amy Ewing: Ms. Ewing echoed the sentiments expressed by Secular Connecticut to expand the scope of the commission to include the removal of religious language. Ms. Ewing identified the language in our state constitution as being geared towards religious white males, which is an extremely obsolete notion considering the diversity and inclusion in our state today. She emphasized the importance of words in terms of promoting inclusivity and equality.

Charlotte Johnstone: Ms. Johnstone staunchly supports the bill. Ms. Johnstone cites a study which found that women are negatively affected by gender exclusive language, particularly during a job interview. In addition to the removal of gender exclusive language, Ms. Johnstone would like to see the committee explore the addition of language that is inclusive of the nonbinary gender identity.

Kelly McConney Moore, Interim Senior Policy Council for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT): The ACLU strongly supports the bill as a means to remove discriminatory language, all while preserving the current meaning of the state constitution. Despite court decisions that have found the use of male pronouns in the constitution as not posing any restriction on the rights of those who are not men, the ACLU believes that there is no reason to not pursue more inclusive language in the constitution.

Cary Shaw, President of Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County: Mr. Shaw supports the removal of gendered and religious language from the state constitution. Mr. Shaw believes that adding gender and religious neutral language would promote freedom, tolerance and harmony and therefore welcome businesses to Connecticut, help create jobs, and attract new residents.

George Unser: Mr. Unser supports the establishment of a commission to recommend the removal of gendered language from the state constitution, as well as any religious language or religious privilege. As a nonreligious person, Mr. Unser fears that the state constitution does not provide him with the same rights that are specifically outlined for religious people in our state constitution. In addition, Mr. Unser cites the growing nonreligious population in Connecticut, with a recent Gallup poll finding that 42% of Connecticut voters identify as nonreligious.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Trevor Hoffman

Date: 03/29/2021