

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-901

AN ACT EXTENDING TO JUNE 30, 2021, CHANGES IMPLEMENTED FOR THE

Title: 2020 STATE ELECTION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19.

Vote Date: 3/5/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/22/2021

File No.: 114

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill allows the changes implemented for the 2020 state election to be extended to June 30th, 2021 as a result of COVID-19. It would allow any person eligible to vote to do so by absentee ballot to allow for easier access of voting in upcoming elections.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Denise W. Merrill, Secretary of the State: In her testimony, the Secretary of the State, expressed that the changes that were made for the election in November 2020 were due to COVID-19 and should be extended to May 31, 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic being ongoing and there not yet being widespread access to a vaccine. Her testimony explains that extending the option to vote by absentee ballot would allow voters to participate in upcoming elections without having to choose between their health and their right to vote.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kelly McConney Moore, Interim senior policy counsel, American Civil Liberties Union of CT: In their testimony, Kelly McConney Moore, stated that by allowing a new absentee voting excuse the legislature had ensured that anyone who wanted to vote in the November 202 election was able to do so without having to risk exposure to a deadly disease. She also explains that in-person voters had faced fewer problems. In their testimony they explained that COVID-19 could still be a pandemic during future elections and people of Connecticut should not have to choose between their health and their vote.

John Erlingheuser, AARP Connecticut: In their testimony, John Erlingheuser, explains that extending the changes that were due to COVID-19 would accommodate the elections that are and will be taking place. He also goes on to stat that it is critical to the health and safety of voters, especially over the age of 65, to continue these health measures.

Anna M. Posniak, Connecticut Town Clerks Association: In her testimony, Anna M. Posniak, states that CTCA strongly believes that every voter should receive equal protection under the law.

Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut: In her testimony, Cheri Quickmire, explained that as of February 19, 2021 the total deaths in CT due to COVID-19 are 7,523 while the number of confirmed cases is 273,101. She then goes onto explain that allowing to extend the changes that were implemented would ensure that voters are safe as they cast their ballots, and no one should have to choose between their health and voting.

Yvonne Senturia, Election Law Specialist, League of Women Voters of CT: Yvonne Senturia testified that no voter should have to choose between protecting their health and being able to vote. They state that the changes made for the 2020 election should be extended due to the uncertainty of the pandemic's trajectory.

Beth Heller, First Selectman of the Town of Woodbridge: Beth Heller testified that they are concerned that voter turnout would be extremely low due to many voters staying home due to COVID-19. They explained that the town of Woodbridge's biennial municipal election will be held on May 3rd, 2021. Since the election is not held in November, they already experience low voter turnout. They express that the changes should be extended to help protect the health of voters as well as the poll workers.

Jeff Leake, Connecticut Education Association: Jeff Leake testified that having citizens greatly participate in the election process is the bedrock of a strong democracy. They testified that extended these changes would remove roadblocks such as time constraints and allow for easier voting and greater participation. They also testified that the changes implemented in 2020 promoted higher participation while ensuring the integrity of the election. They stated that with over 1.8 million ballots cast in the 2020 election in CT, incidents of fraud/mishandling have been few.

Robert Bibbiani: Bibbiani testified that the sense of inclusion is particularly important when considering the election process. They explain that the 2020 election is proof that the state can take steps towards safe and secure absentee ballot voting. They explain that many residents work and are unable to take time off during the date to vote, resulting in them waiting in long lines before or after work. They state that extending the voting implementations that had been made for the 2020 election would improve voter participation.

Jane Chisholm: Chisholm testified that they were very grateful that early absentee voting was allowed during the 2020 voting season and realized how much stress it relieved. They explained that allowing the absentee drop boxes allowed them peace to not worry about the health and safety concerns surrounding COVID-19. They explain that continuing these voting implementations would continue to relieve stress that many voters feel when it comes time to cast their ballots.

Marta Daniels, Member, Safe Vote CT and Voter Choice CT: Daniels testified that given the large and welcome use of no-excuse absentee ballots in the November 2020 election and the highest number of voter participation in Connecticut, the voting implementations made should be extended to continue to achieve higher levels of participation. They explain that, “vast economic inequalities in Connecticut’s voting population guarantee that poverty, race and place of employment will weigh heaviest upon certain voting groups. These voters will always find it harder to show up in person on one day in November to vote”.

The following individuals submitted testimony in support of SB 901. They cited reasons similar to those stated in the aforementioned testimonies:

Paula Bacolini, Founder/Leader, Make Voting Easy – CT
Ethel Berger
Susan Bouregy
Mary Breton
Lori Clymas
Emelia DeMuisis
Elizabeth G. Donovan
Amy Ewing
Eleanor Fischer
Pua Ford
Charlie Galliher
Kate Gilstad-Hayden
Lauren Gister
Zachary Hayden
Jan Hochadel, President, AFT Connecticut
Annie & Neil Hornish
Steve Jones
Kris Kuhn
Shannon R. Lane, LMSW, PhD
Sue W. Larsen, President, ROVAC
Carol LeWitt
Cynthia R. Lignar
Claire Matthews
Kimberley Megrath
Phyllis Nauts
Hilary Poole
Tanya Rhodes Smith, Director, Nancy A Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work
Connor C. Riordan
Isaac Ruiz
Claire Sauer
Jessie Stratton
Theodore L. Taigen
Erica Udoff
Roseann Ventimiglia, PhD

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Linda Syznkowicz, Founder/CEO of Fight Voter Fraud Inc.: Linda Syznkowicz testified that the Secretary of the State, Denise Merrill, has failed the public in ensuring that voter rolls are "clean". They stated that before making additional changes on the methods of voting for eligible voters the voter rolls need to be properly cleaned and maintained. This would include people that no longer live in the State of CT, the deceased, and inactive voters. They testified that the focus should be put on ensuring only eligible voters are allowed to vote in CT. Linda explained that the data base records (maintained by the Secretary of State) include voters that have two voter ID numbers and 104 people voted twice, making the election unfair. They explained that changes can not be made to the Constitution until the Secretary of State is doing their job properly and voting rights of the people in CT are protected.

Cherie Juhnke: In their testimony, Cherie stated that the November election exceeded the ability of our towns and cities. They explained that the state can resume the standard voting practices safely while ensure the elections are secure. They explained that allowing for absentee voting increases the chance of fraud and signatures need to be verified as well as ID being present.

Anne Manusky, President, Connecticut Republican Assembly: Anne Manusky testified that allowing absentee voting for COVID-19 violated the rights of citizens. They explained Connecticut already has issues with the election process that need to be addressed prior to adding more changes.

Arnold L. Goldman, Chairman, Canton Republican Town Committee: Arnold testified that allowing this bill to pass would undermine the rights of legal voters. Their mother was an immigrant from a nation under Communist rule and emphasized how precious the right to vote was and it was necessary for the citizen to exercise it. They explain that changing the rules around elections would encourage questionable actions on either political side and would in turn weaken the confidence residents have in the voting system.

Beverly Hanna: Testified that extending changes is unnecessary due to the COVID-19 infection rate being under 3%. Beverly Hanna testified that the state should be returning to running as normal.

Valerie Gesualdi: In their testimony Valerie Gesualdi stated that many voters today are disenfranchised and that there is one vote for each legal voter. They explained that the voter rolls need to be cleaned up first. They state that mail in ballots will always be able to be used in a fraudulent manner and Connecticut does not have the resources to manage mail in ballots with the necessary integrity. They explain that a legal ID is required to be shown when buying a house, buying a car or getting married and should be the same when it comes to voting. They also state that one day is more than enough to be able to vote seeing as though it doesn't happen often.

Isabelle Hargrove: Isabelle testified that they became a citizen of the United States in 2000 and since doing so has not missed an opportunity to vote in an election as they always were able to find time within the fourteen hours provided to voters to cast their vote. They explain that the bills being proposed will create a more convoluted voting process that will cause more doubt in regard to the integrity of the state's elections. They explained that studies show that turnout is not increased by no excuse absentee or early voting. They express that

Connecticut voter rolls need to be cleaned up and this should be a priority before making other changes.

Crystal McKeever: Testified that every legal voter should have an equal opportunity to vote, however, opportunities for fraud need to be addressed and eliminated before making any large scope changes to the voting system.

Brenda Hamilton: Hamilton testified that going forward it is important to focus on restoring the faith in the election process by requiring voter ID, limiting voting to a single Election day using paper ballots, and offering verified absentee ballots to citizens who are unable to vote on Election day. They explain that it is the Constitutional right and privilege to render one vote only per American voter.

Christopher Sullivan: Sullivan expressed that early and mail in voting causes mistrust and inaccuracies in the results of an election. They state that while it is everyone's right to vote, it is also their responsibility to show up on Election day and only the most extreme of circumstances should be allowed for early or mail in voting.

The following individuals submitted testimony in opposition of SB 901. They cited reasons similar to those stated in the aforementioned testimonies:

Rick Aiello
Alan Barnett
Maureen Blum
Linda Czaplinski
Robert M. Dewey
Erin M. Domenech
Ann Hartford
Peter D. Herger, Esq.
Jeffrey J. Hogan
Ray Lecours
Michelle Lynn
Matthew Masi
Richard W. Mayhew
Crystal McKeever
Victoria Morton
Maryellen R. Nilson
Mike Nintean
PGN
Lisa Pojano
Michael Riley
Henry Ruddy
Kathy Samodel
Kristen Schlim
Sean
Berrin Snyder
Jim Townsley
Doretta Wildes
Roberet Wnek

Dori Wollen

Reported by: Jenna Schwerdtle

Date: 3-5-2021