

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1017

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTION ADMINISTRATION.

Vote Date: 4/5/2021

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:

This bill would make the use of absentee ballot drop boxes permanent, bring certain state laws relating to the circulation of nominating and primary petitions into compliance with federal case law. It would also require the Secretary of the State to develop a system that would allow election-related forms to be signed electronically. It would also require all municipal elections to be held in November and restore voting rights to parolees.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Denise W. Merrill, Secretary of the State, State of Connecticut: Merrill testified that absentee ballot drop boxes gave voters a say way to cast their ballots without having person-to-person contact or relying on the United States Postal Service. They state that the electronic signature provision would allow for absentee ballots to be requested electronically in addition to increasing the number of people who are eligible to vote but do not have a CT driver's license. Merrill testifies that the bill will also create a process in which the Secretary of the State can audit redistricting changes to make sure that said changes are correctly made at the local level. They state that these changes would make the administration of elections easier for local election officials as well as navigating the administration for voters.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut: Quickmire testified that making ballot drop boxes permanent is the natural response to the success that was

observed in the 2020 election. They explain that local election official took the required security seriously and voters were safe from unwanted contact and health concerns. They state that this method of voting should be a permanent part of the state's election administration.

Yvonne Senturia, Election Law Specialist, League of Women Voters of Connecticut:

Senturia explains that making ballot drop boxes permanent would allow voters flexibility to drop off their votes outside of business hours as well as the security of knowing that their vote was delivered successfully. Senturia testifies that permanent ballot drop boxes would maximize voter participation.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut: Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut testified that making absentee ballot drop boxes permanent will provide another avenue for voters to submit their ballot. They explain that if a voter is concerned that their ballot won't arrive in time when mailing it out, they can simply drop their ballot off in the ballot box and be ensured that their vote will be counted. They state that the drop boxes will increase the ease of voting.

Gail E Janensch, Treasurer, League of Women Voters of the Bridgeport Area: In their testimony, Janensch stated that making vote drop-boxes permanent and restoring voting rights to person on parole is important for bigger cities in Connecticut such as Bridgeport.

Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW, National Association of Social Workers/Connecticut Chapter: Wanczyk-Karp testified that absentee ballot drop-boxes were very popular with the last election and allowed people to securely and safely cast their vote. They explain that by continuing the use of the drop boxes it will shorten lines at the polls, provide convenience to voters, and encourage voting. They also state that if no excuse absentee voting comes to Connecticut the boxes will make the process of voting even more practical.

Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Executive Director, YWCA: Madden-Hennessey testified that the pandemic demonstrated the security and effectiveness of ballot drop boxes. They state that this bill is necessary so voters may retain the freedom they had in 2020 to utilize the drop boxes.

George A. Mudge: Mudge testified that this bill is necessary to allow voters that are currently qualifying to vote absentee the same freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's secure ballot drop boxes. They also testify that allowing people who are re-entering their communities on parole is important because, "disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state. Those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities—those with significant populations of Black and Latino people".

Harold Jordan: Jordan testified that there has been no evidence offered to support any claims saying that mail-in balloting was fraudulent. They also state that if parolees have rehabilitated themselves enough to regain their freedom, they should be able to exercise their right to vote.

John Erlingheuser, AARP Connecticut: Erlingheuser stated that the drop boxes used in the 2020 election proved to be very popular and successful and should be made permanent.

Win Evarts, Executive Director, The Arc of Connecticut, Inc.: Evarts testified that passing SB 1017 is necessary so that voters retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes. They explain that the convenience of such implementations, "increases the ability of citizens who rely on others to participate in our democracy in their communities".

Nicolette Doukas: Doukas stated that we are still dealing with a relentless virus and it is necessary to make every accommodation for voters to be able to safely participate in our democracy.

Vanessa Hawke: Hawke testified that they are in favor of passing SB 1017 as voters should be able to retain the freedom they had in the November 2020 election to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.

Dennis Mema: Mema explained that this bill makes meaningful progress towards the ultimate goals of equity and security in our elections. They state that permanent ballot drop boxes would increase voting accessibility and stimulate voter turnout. They also explain that allowing voters to submit election-related signatures electronically will also increase accessibility and modernization of the voting process.

Aaron Goode, Founder, New Haven Votes Coalition: Goode testified that having absentee ballot drop boxes made permanent would eliminate the concern that voters have of their ballots not be counted due to arriving late.

Paula Bacolini, Founder/Leader, Make Voting Easy-CT: Bacolini testified that as a senior citizen, having the option of dropping their ballots off in a secure absentee ballot drop box made it both easy and safe for them to cast their vote.

The following individuals submitted testimony in support of SB 1017. They cited reasons similar to those stated in the aforementioned testimonies:

Lynn Alvery Dawson
Stephen Anderson, President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001
David Asbery
Christopher Atchley
Sauda Efia Baraka
Ellen T. Bartley
Mubera Becirovic
Ellen Becker
Joelle Berger
Eva Bermudez Zimmerman
Gail Berritt
Black and Brown United in Action
Leslie P. Blank
Robert P. Blank
Lynda Shannon Bluestein
Sari Bodi
Corinne Bolding
Richard Boritz

Tracy Bowens
Alderman Darryl J. Brackeen Jr., City of New Haven
Maureen Chalmers, President, The 4Cs, SEIU Local 1973
Val and Patty Chamberlain
Carl Chisem, President, Connecticut Employees union Independent, SEIU Local 511
Martin Cobern
Susan and Robert Cooper
Erin Crosby, Director, Women's Empowerment and Racial Justice
Marta Daniels
Susan David
Josephine Deignan
Mary Doherty
Shenae Draugh
Debra Elkins Dickey
Stephanie FitzGerald
Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut
Lauren Garrett
Regina Griffin
Mary-Kathryn Harrity
Bridgeport Generation Now Votes
Jennifer Herdt
Deborah Howland-Murray
Linda Hudson
Sharon Huttner
Michele Jacklin
Sneha Jayaraj
Leyte L. Jefferson
Jaccorbeau M. Terrone
Dominique E. Johnson
Jacqueline Johnson
Jody Kesten
Leah Raechel Killeen
Patricia Klindienst
Shannon R. Lane
Sue W. Larsen, President, ROVAC
Vanessa Liles
Angela Liptack
Daniel Livingston, Chief Negotiator, SEBAC
Sal Luciano, President, CT AFL-CIO
Angela Mazur
Kelly McConney Moore, interim policy counsel, ACLU-CT
Jennifer McPherson
Marissa Mead
Bonita Messman
Karimah Mickens Webber
Susan Miller
Arlene Murphy
Rochelle Palache, District Director, SEIU 32BJ
Rachel Papalski

Jonathan Perloe, Co-founder, Voter Choice CT
Elsa Peterson Obuchowski
Linda Pryde
Patricia Rapoport
Jesse Samberg
Tanya Rhodes Smith
Carol Rizzolo
Pegeen Rubinstein
Paula and Mitchell Sakofs
Breina Schain
Marge and David Schneider
Karen Schnitzer
Melissa Shein
Susan Singer
Irene Skrybailo
Peter Spain
John Stewart
David and Judy Stone
Garrett Sullivan
Alisa Trachtenberg
Taylor Tucker
Yann van Heurck
Judy Villa
Vicki Volper
Roxana Walker-Canton
Tom Wallace
Luther Weeks
Dinah Wells
Meg Wolfe
Janee Woods Weber, President, PoliticaCT
Stacey Zimmerman, SEIU CT
Iliana Zuniga

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Brian Mezick, Connecticut State Marshal, State Marshal's Association of Connecticut:

The State Marshal Association of Connecticut testified in opposition of Section 23, 24, 25, and 26 of this bill stating that important election writs should be served by State Marshals rather than being transmitted electronically. They state that these moments in Connecticut election history should continue to observe the traditional legal process.

Reported by: Jenna Schwerdtle

Date: 04/052021