

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SJ-29
Title: RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING.
Vote Date: 03/15/2023
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 2/22/2023
File No.: 259

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill is a resolution approving an amendment to the state constitution to allow for no-excuse absentee voting. This comes as a result of the increase in the use of absentee voting during the 2020 general election, as a necessity of the Covid-19 pandemic. This also comes alongside a majority received by the early voting question in the 2022 referendum. This amendment if approved shall be proposed to electors in the 2024 general election.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Secretary of state, Stephanie Thomas, Office of the Secretary of State: Secretary of State Thomas, issued her support for both the passage of SJ-29 as well as HJ-1, both of which would amend the state constitution to allow for no excuse absentee voting in the state of Connecticut. She notes how during the Covid-19 pandemic, more than ¼ of all votes cast in the 2020 election were absentee ballots. She further notes that after the "overwhelming" support of Question #1 in the 2022 referendum to allow early voting in the state of CT, it is time to "further reduce the burden of voting by having access to no-excuse absentee ballots". Secretary Thomas, then goes into detail behind the support that no excuse absentee voting receives across the country. She notes on how both blue and red states support no excuse absentee voting and how public polling in Connecticut alone is at 73% approval of the implementation. The Secretary concludes her testimony urging legislators to pass SJ-29 so that "Connecticut can make their voices heard in 2024".

Representative Vincent Candelora, House Republican Caucus: Representative Candelora and the House Republican Caucus is opposed to SJ-29, stating that "in reality we

never really know for sure who is casting an absentee ballot". They also state that as the topic of early voting is happening simultaneously in this committee, significant changes are being implemented into the state election process, without the consideration of the integrity of the election. Representative Candelora concludes by stating that, "The state should proceed cautiously when it considers expanding the opportunity for electors to vote by mail".

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kathleen Callahan, Co-Chair, NASW/CT ELAN: Ms. Kathleen Callahan, as well as the Connecticut chapter of the National association of social workers, support the passage of SJ-29 and calls upon members of the committee to support all legislation to increase access to voting. The Connecticut chapter also calls for a referendum on no excuse absentee voting like question #1 in the 2022 midterm election. Ms. Callahan concludes her testimony by asking that Connecticut voters decide in 2024 to amend the state constitution to allow for no excuse absentee voting.

Paula Bacolini, Founder and Leader, Make Voting Easy-CT: Ms. Bacolini begins her testimony by noting how easy, voting was in the 2020 general election with no excuse absentee voting available, and applauds members of the assembly for making it possible. She then notes while this did receive Bi-Partisan support in both the house and senate during the 2020 summer special legislative session, it "was not permanent". Ms. Bacolini asks that the members of this assembly give the voters a choice. She concludes her testimony by asking that SJ-29 and other bills in support of absentee voting be voted out of committee.

Nancy J. Dinardo, Chair, Connecticut Democratic State Central Committee: Ms. Dinardo stated her support for the passage of SJ-29, noting how Connecticut is often a trendsetter, but the state falls behind compared to the rest of the country when it comes to voter access. Ms. Dinardo then goes into detail, noting the increased use of absentee ballots during the 2020 election, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, citing remarkable voter use asking that it be made permanent. While Ms. Dinardo does not have a preference on the allotted to time for which absentee ballots may be accepted, she does call on members of the assembly to implement this process this year, before the presidential election in 2024, and that all legislation include funding for municipalities.

Karen Edwards, Member of Indivisible Stamford, Professor of Public Health and Adjunct Associate Professor of Pediatrics: Professor Edwards expressed her support for SJ-29, beginning her testimony by citing the overwhelming support which was received by Question #1 in the 2022 referendum. While Professor Edwards urges members of the assembly to implement early voting for the 2024 presidential election, she also asks that no excuse absentee voting be brought before the electorate for a vote as well. She then notes how making voting easier does not "diminish the preciousness of the right to vote", and that nothing is gained by making voting more difficult in this state. Professor Edwards then speaks to her experience as a pediatrician and notes how she can attest to "the complex responsibilities that parents juggle to keep their families safe, healthy and happy". Professor Edwards then concludes her testimony stating that the implementation of early voting has not remove all barriers to the voting process and the implementation of no excuse absentee voting will remove the remaining barriers and increase voter turnout.

John Erlingheuser, Senior Advocacy & Outreach Director, AARP Connecticut: Mr.

Erlingheuser begins his testimony by citing that "The right to vote is among the most basic of all civic and Constitutional rights". Mr. Erlingheuser, then notes how recent elections have revealed many failings in the election system that restrict individuals' ability to vote, many of these being logistical problems faced by municipalities. Mr. Erlingheuser then states that AARP wishes for policies to be passed which promote maximum participation in the electoral process. Mr. Erlingheuser concludes his testimony by citing the popularity of both early and no excuse absentee voting among the older and younger voters.

Mary-Kathryn Harrity, Ambassador and Advocate, Alzheimer's Association –

Connecticut Chapter: Ms. Harrity stated her strong support for legislation pushing for both no excuse absentee voting and the implementation of early voting into the election process. She then speaks to the difficulty of patients with Alzheimer's, or other dementia related diseases and the toll it not only takes upon the individual, but those around them. She states how people with Alzheimer's or other dementia related diseases, rely upon family members or others for a multitude of daily routines. She states how this affects many individuals in terms of voting as caretakers can find little to no time to vote. This is where she claims that no excuse absentee voting would be of great benefit to caregivers who simply wish to perform their fundamental role as citizens.

League of Women Voters of CT(LWV): The League of Women Voters of CT states that they, support all measures which ensures that absentee ballots are available to all electors. They note that " voters with disabilities, demanding work schedules, limited mobility, child and/or elder care responsibilities or a lack of reliable transportation should be able to carry out their civic duty by voting absentee without an 'excuse". To conclude their testimony the League asks that members of the general assembly pass legislation which removes the requirement for individuals to obtain an excuse and allow for no excuse absentee voting in the state of Connecticut.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving: The Hartford foundation for public giving seeks to dismantle structural racism and promote civic engagement in the community. They support SJ-29, and believe that with the proper resources and preparation, Connecticut can implement no excuse absentee voting, like several other states which implemented it during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Patricia Spruance, Windham Town Clerk, Connecticut Town Clerks Association:

Connecticut town clerks association supports no excuse absentee voting in the State of CT. They believe that alongside early voting, no excuse absentee voting will give voters the largest access to the ballot possible. They also ask that alongside this bill, the assembly calls for the replacement of 25-year-old voting tabulation machines, and update voting systems across the state. They state that without these resources and funding it may take several days to count all votes cast in an election.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut

(ACLU-CT): Ms. Zaccagnino and the (ACLU-CT), support SJ-29, along with any legislation that seeks to give equal access to the ballot box for voters. They also support any legislation which increases voting access to previously disenfranchised groups. Ms. Zaccagnino then states how in previous elections before the Covid-19 pandemic, there were very few available

options for voters, other than voting in person on election day. Ms. Zaccagnino then notes how Connecticut's voting laws have historically impacted people of color and minorities. She concludes her testimony by calling on members of the assembly to decrease "Congestion" at the polls.

The following individuals submitted testimony in support of SJ-29. They cited reasons similar to those stated in the aforementioned testimonies:

Deena Allard
Michael Bailey, Executive Director, UConn-AAUP
Alice Baxter
Janet Bellamy
Leslie P. Blank\
Richard Blank
Robert P. Blank
Joelle Berger
Jordana Bloom
Bobbi Essagof
Joseph Bobrow
Richard Boritz
John Brady, AFTCT, Executive Vice President
Deborah Brody
Linda Bronstein
Deborah Calloway
Michael Carrington
Marilyn Carroll
Jane Cavanaugh
Martin E. Cobern
Queenie Collins
Tom Connolly
Sharon Conway
Ruth Cook
Laura Copland, (DWA), Member
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
Marta Daniels
Gemeem Davis, President & Co-Director, Bridgeport Generation Now Votes
Jennifer Dayton
Christine Denning
Mary Ellen Doblecki, Board member, LWV SECT, LWV Southeastern CT
Cathleen Donnelly
Patricia Donovan
Robin Druckman Chair, Stamford Democratic City Committee
Cynthia Dul
Doris Dumas
Barbara Edinberg
Lawrence Edwards, PhD
Elizabeth Eldridge
Vera DeBrito-Esdaile
Diana Evans, Member of the Advisory Board of Common Cause

Win Evarts
Christina Fagerstal
Patrick A. Farley
Karen Fecko
Stephanie FitzGerald
Terry Fitzgerald
Kathy Flaherty, Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project
Mary Fleischli
Pua Ford
Seth Freeman
Tim Gabriele
Ann Gadwah, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut
Alfreda Gaither
Callie Gale Heilmann, Co-Director, Bridgeport Generation Now Vote
Lisa Galinski
Cheryl Gatling-Galloway
Sarah Ganong
Christine Gianquinto, Member, Democracy Women in Action
Mark Goldstein
Lauren Gray
MaryAnn Guglielmo
Ashley Gulyas
Jim Gustin
Leanne Harpin
Maureen Harry
Ed Hawthorne, President Connecticut, AFL-CIO
Marie Hayes
Jaclyn Kusluch, Hebron
Laurie Heiss
Marie L'Heureux
Ms. Sally Hill
Harald Hille
Jenny Hille
Beth Hillson
Bayly Hoehne, Chair of Connecticut High School Democrats
Patricia Holloway
Michael A Holness
Mrs. Wendy Holness
Annie Hornish
Damian Humphrey
Jonathan Humphrey
Dr. Nancy Hutchinson
Lynne Ide, Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut
Michele Jacklin, Member of the board of Common Cause in Connecticut
Sondi Jackson
Catherine Jacobson
Diane Jamieson
Joanne Steinhart
Jacqueline Rubell Johnson

Brian Kabcenell
Jackie Kaiko
Lisa Kelly
Jody Kesten
Mary Lee A. Kiernan, President & CEO, YWCA Greenwich
Nicole Klein
Edward Koistinen
Jerome Kranz
Joan Kranz
Celeste Lacroix
Sharon Lazar
Andrea Levine
Judy Lhamon, League of Women Voters of Hamden-North Haven
Angela Liptack
Elizabeth Litt
Hadley Lord
Janet Luongo
Robert Maher
John Matz
Susan Mazur
Pastor William McCullough, Senior Pastor of Russell Temple CME Church in Bridgeport
Barbara Mechler, Retired public school admin
Felice Miller Baritz
Caroline Miller
Elise Miller
Michele Millham
Meredith Molyneux
Leslee Asch Morrison
Carole Mulready
Arlene Murphy
Erika Murphy
Deborah Howland-Murray
Georgia Newcomb
Linda Obedzinski
Adrienne Parkmond
Tameeka Parks
Lynne Peck
Jonathan Perloe
Nerlyn Pierson
Halina P Platt
Merla Porter
Kathleen Powers
Charlotte Pyle
Laly Noya Rakotoniaina
Jacqueline Randolph
Dr. Carol Rizzolo
Professor Lawrence Rizzolo
Katherine Roberts
Michael Rosa

Annea Rosenberg
Steven Rosenberg
Abigail Roth
Pegeen Rubinstein
Patricia C Vener-Saavedra
David Sales
Judith Sanchirico
Alison Sanchirico
Thomas Sanchirico
Helen Milo Sandalls
Alison V. Scherer
David and Marjorie Schneider
Phyllis Schondorf
Marianne Schorer
Charmaine Seavy
Patti Sirulnick
Celia Smith
Judith Sparer
Ann Speyer
Kenneth Speyer
Stephen and Marion Stern
Tom Stewart
Sarah Sullivan
Donna Rizzo-Szarwak
Lynn H. Taborsak
Karen Tracy
Melinda Tuhus
Yvonne Tuttle
Yann van Heurck
Roseann Ven miglia, PhD
Herman Vogel
Vicki Volper
Amber Walsh
Claire Walsh
David Walsh
David Ware
John Waxman
Donald Weigt
Sherry Wernicke
Lisa Wiesner
Dean Williams
Steven Winter
Travis Woodward, President of CSEA SEIU Local 2001
Steve Zales
Stacey Zimmerman
Jordana Bloom
Jennifer Dayton
Stephanie FitzGerald
Mary Fleischli

Lisa Galinski
Beth Hillson

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jeffrey Caggiano, Mayor, City of Bristol: Mayor Jeffrey Caggiano stated his staunch opposition to no excuse absentee voting and suggested in its replacement that the state implement a centralized EDR style voting system one or two weekends before the election. He states that here ballots will be held until election day.

Theresa Gambardella: Ms. Gambardella stated her opposition to the SJ-29, stating that this is unnecessary and will lead to unnecessary expenses.

Kathleen Misset: Ms. Misset stated her opposition of SJ-29, citing her experience working with a grassroots voter integrity group post 2020 election. She stated that the group found the largest potential for fraud was with absentee ballots and their group currently has a case with the SEEC. She concludes her testimony by stating that "If you care about honest election results, you will leave the absentee voting as it had always been pre covid. Apply for a ballot with proof of ID and reason. Once received, submit the absentee ballot that would then be signature verified".

Jennifer Damon: Ms. Damon cited her opposition to SJ-29, citing that " Any Early or Absentee voting other than those serving overseas or for documented medical conditions should not be allowed or expanded".

Debbie Esposito: Ms. Esposito opposes SJ-29, citing a lack of voter identify confidence and lack of chain of custody for absentee ballots. She also cites her own experience citing voter records she canvassed, to which she states she found a great deal of irregularities.

Ms. Katherine Sarris: Ms. Katherine Sarris, opposes SJ-29, citing unaddressed costs to local municipalities and lack of measures to deal with increased fraudulent activity as her reasoning.

Reported by: Thomas Togneri

Date: 03-15-2023