



DATE: March 13, 2019
TO: Government Administration & Elections Committee
FROM: Samantha Bell, Public Policy Intern, MSW Candidate
RE: H.J. 161 RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Government Administration & Elections Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.J. 161 A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting.

My name is Samantha Bell, Public Policy Intern, at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance. The Alliance is Connecticut's statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofits, with a membership of more than 300 community organizations and associations across the state. Nonprofits deliver essential community services to more than half a million people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

I live and work in Manchester and am currently pursuing my Masters in Social Work at the University of Connecticut. As an aspiring social worker, I recognize that voting rights are central to civil rights, and voter suppression is far too prevalent throughout our country. In Connecticut, we should be working to make it easier, not more difficult, for people to vote. This includes removing structural or procedural barriers that prevent people from voting.

H.J.161 would make it easier for people to get to the polls by allowing for early voting and no-excuse absentee voting. No-excuse absentee voting would allow a person to mail in a paper ballot before the day of the election without needing an excuse for why they are unable to vote on Election Day, and early voting would permit people to visit an election official's office or another approved voting location and cast a vote in person before Election Day.

Community nonprofits across Connecticut engaged thousands of voters through a "Pledge to Vote" campaign for 2018 election, and part of The Alliance's mission is to encourage more civic engagement among nonprofits, their staff and the people they serve. If we want Connecticut residents to participate fully in the democratic process, we need to provide them with greater access to do so.

It is important that Connecticut makes it easier for people to vote, especially among low-income citizens, many of whom work multiple jobs with non-standard schedules and face barriers to transportation, child-care and more, making it more difficult to vote on Election Day.

States that have the highest levels of voter turnout by lower-income citizens have the least restrictive social welfare policies and are more likely to fund essential services like health care and services for children.² In addition, while people with disabilities are able to receive a permanent absentee ballot in Connecticut, it requires a doctor's note and separate application. No-excuse absentee voting would make that process much simpler.

In 2018, the Election Law Journal published a study that analyzed the ease of voting in each state and ranked them from 1 to 50 based on state voting laws.³ Connecticut ranked 15, behind Nebraska and before West Virginia. The study found that states with no-excuse absentee voting and early voting options ranked higher than those that did not offer these options.

While I have never had trouble making it to the polls on Election Day, not everyone is so lucky. I have friends, colleagues, and clients that have been unable to make it to the polls on Election Day because of personal or professional obligations that fall outside the scope of "acceptable excuses." These incidences are not the exception. Voting is not a luxury and it is time we stopped treating it like one.

Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have implemented no-excuse absentee voting and 39 states and the District of Columbia allow in-person early voting¹.

The Alliance supports H.J. 161 and urges you to vote in favor of this constitutional amendment, allowing early voting and no-excuse absentee voting.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. (2019). Absentee and early voting. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>

² Avery, J. M. & Peffley, M. (2005). Voter registration requirements, voter turnout, and welfare eligibility policy: Class bias matters. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 5(1), pp 47-67.

³ Li, Q., Pomantell, M. J., & Schraufnagel, S. (2018). Cost of voting in the American states. *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy*(17).