

February 4, 2021

Dear Legislative Leaders:

When COVID-19 hit, members of the legislature, Governor Lamont and Secretary Merrill jumped into action to safeguard voting rights and ensure that voting would be safe, secure and accessible throughout the pandemic. Thanks to that leadership and the temporary expansion of voter access that it allowed – including expanded absentee ballot voting, mailing absentee ballot applications to registered voters, and the installation of secure drop-boxes – Connecticut was able to run one of its smoothest elections in recent history. Voter participation reached near-record highs with nearly 80% of registered voters participating, lines at the polls were manageable, and results came in on time.

The truth is that despite these temporary reforms, Connecticut still lags behind our neighbors and states across the country when it comes to voter access. We urge all members of the Connecticut General Assembly to support Our Voice, Our Vote CT- an ambitious voting rights legislative agenda that must be prioritized as early as possible this session, including:

1. A constitutional amendment to allow all registered voters to vote by absentee ballot without an “excuse”
2. A constitutional amendment to allow early, in-person voting
3. Legislation to allow for absentee ballots to be counted early
4. Legislation to implement automatic voter registration (AVR) and update the online voter registration (OVR) system
5. Legislation to restore voting rights for individuals on parole

These steps are commonsense, bipartisan, long overdue, and will make Connecticut a national leader when it comes to voter access and voting rights. The 2020 election was the first time our state allowed all voters to vote by absentee ballot – and it was an incredible success, with close to 700,000 (more than one in three) voters choosing to vote absentee, and fewer than 1% of ballots rejected. Connecticut also did the right thing by passing legislation that allowed municipal officials the ability to pre-process absentee ballots early, which gave local registrars and election workers the time they needed to ensure that results would be tabulated quickly, accurately and transparently. As a result, Connecticut avoided the weeks of uncertainty that other states encountered, and upheld the strength of our democratic process. This session, we have the chance to make these temporary reforms permanent - we can't afford to let that opportunity pass us by.

Connecticut must also take this historic opportunity to join the 44 other states across the country that allow in-person early voting. Early voting is a simple step that would make our voting process more accessible while helping to cut down on Election Day lines. For many working families, getting to the polls on Election Day is no easy task, forcing some to choose between family and work obligations, and their civic duty. With early voting, they would no longer be forced to make that choice.

Enacting early voting, as well as expanding absentee ballot voting, would require a constitutional amendment, like the one proposed by Secretary Merrill. We agree with Secretary Merrill that voters shouldn't have to wait years for these reforms to become reality – the time for these reforms is now.

It's also time for Connecticut to pass automatic voter registration (AVR) into law. Implementing AVR will help hundreds of thousands of new voters automatically register. By reducing paperwork and streamlining the process of voter registration when residents interact with state agencies, AVR will allow Connecticut to modernize our elections and keep our voter rolls up to date, while ultimately saving taxpayer dollars at a time when lawmakers will be making difficult choices to address the budget deficit. We also urge the legislature to take this opportunity to support updating our online voter registration (OVR) system by allowing people to register to vote with a social security number in case they do not have a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) ID. Doing so will help bring our registration system into the 21st century and make the process, faster, as well as more open and accessible to all eligible residents.

Restoring voting rights for individuals on parole is an issue that strikes at the heart of social and racial justice. Stripping the right to vote from those on parole, is an act of disenfranchisement that has disproportionately impacted communities of color in Connecticut for far too long. By restoring the right to vote for people on parole, Connecticut can begin to remove barriers to voting for thousands of people, and help welcome back individuals looking to reengage in their communities. Every electorate in Connecticut should be able to exercise their right to vote and receive representation – including those who are reentering society.

In 2019, AVR passed in the House but was left in the Senate until the last day of session, ultimately never getting brought up for a final vote. We can't afford to let that happen again – Connecticut voters deserve action on voting rights and voter access this session. That's why we – a coalition of good government groups and other organizations who share this vision are writing today to strongly urge our legislative leaders to make Our Voice, Our Vote CT a priority from day one.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Connecticut

Action Together CT

Action Together CT - New Haven County

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Connecticut

Association of Retired Teachers of Connecticut (ARTC)

Black and Brown United in Action

BLM 860

Board of the Middle Eastern and North African Law Students' Association, Yale Law School

Bridgeport Generation Now Votes

Bristol Branch NAACP

CAIR Connecticut

Center for Latino Progress

Cheshire Democratic Town Committee

Clean Water Action  
Collaborative Center for Justice  
Common Cause in Connecticut  
Communications Workers of America Local 1298  
Congregation Mishkan Israel  
Connecticut AFL-CIO  
Connecticut Citizen Action Group  
Connecticut Employees Union Independent CEUI SEIU Local 511  
Connecticut Federation of Democratic Women  
Connecticut League of Conservation Voters  
Connecticut Working Families  
CONNPIRG Students  
CSEA SEIU Local 2001  
CT Alliance for Retired Americans  
CT Black Women  
Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington  
Generation Change CT  
Greater Hartford Progressive Democratic Women's Club  
Hamden Action Now  
Hamden Democratic Town Committee  
Hamden Progressive Action Network (HamPAN)  
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving  
Hartford Votes~Hartford Vota Coalition  
Heritage Village Democratic Club  
Hispanic Federation Connecticut State Office  
Keep the Promise Coalition  
League of Women Voters of Connecticut  
League of Women Voters of the Bridgeport Area Inc.  
Make Voting Easy-CT  
Moral Monday CT  
National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter  
National Organization for Women (NOW)  
New Britain Racial Justice Coalition  
New Haven Democratic Town Committee  
New Haven Peoples Center  
New Haven Rising  
New Haven Votes Coalition  
Norwalk Women Who Vote  
Our Revolution Connecticut  
PAN34 (Progressive Action Network for the 34th district)  
PerSisters  
PoliticaCT  
Power Up Manchester  
Progressive Women of Greater Hartford  
ReSisters  
Road to Rights

SEIU - CT State Council  
SEIU 32BJ  
Sierra Club Connecticut  
Social Action Council, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury  
Southbury Democratic Town Committee  
Southern New England Conference United Church of Christ  
Southington Democratic Town Committee  
State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition (SEBAC)  
The 4Cs SEIU 1973  
The Arc Connecticut  
The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport  
UAW Region 9A  
Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut  
University of Connecticut AAUP  
University of Connecticut School of Social Work  
Urban Concepts, Inc.  
UU the Vote CT  
Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church  
Voter Choice Connecticut  
Wallingford Democratic Town Committee  
Waterbury Muslims  
West Hartford Womens Huddle (WEHA)  
Western Connecticut Action Network  
Western Connecticut Area Labor Federation  
Woodbury Democratic Town Committee  
YWCA Greenwich  
YWCA New Britain