

Testimony of Alex A. Knopp

COMMON CAUSE in CONNECTICUT

February 22, 2023

In Support of HB 5004 and related Early Voting Implementation Efforts

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

My name is Alex Knopp and I'm proud to be representing Common Cause in Connecticut in support of this Committee's important efforts to implement the voters' strong support of Early Voting in Connecticut. I recognize that the exact wording of the bill or perhaps bills that will emerge from this Committee is a work in progress as the committee has raised several bills on the same issue. We generally support HB 5004 as well as companion efforts reflected by House Bills 5703, 5713 and 5721 and Senate Bills 1057 and 1064 to maximize voter participation in Connecticut elections. With that in mind we will suggest a few principles, at a minimum, that could guide the language for the vehicle or vehicles this Committee elects to bring forward.

First, we suggest a minimum of at least two weeks of early voting, including weekend and evening hours. This is necessary to meaningfully increase access for working people, especially single parent families, and those working multiple jobs.

Second, we suggest that the bill provide an option for registrars to choose more than one early voting location. We suggest doing so when the number of registered voters in a town is greater than 25,000 and for each additional 25,000 registered voters thereafter. Early voting will not succeed if during the most critical hours there are lines at the polls, or if there is not a convenient location for voters. For comparison, on Election Day, West Hartford has 10 polling places for its 47,000 registered voters. This would suggest that at least two polling places – and perhaps more – would be needed for early voting.

Third, we suggest that the bill direct registrars to provide at least one polling place easily accessible to public transportation in any town with 15,000 or more registered voters. Voters who don't have cars or can't drive are those most likely to have difficulty reaching polling places.

Finally, we suggest that the State be financially responsible for the additional municipal costs incurred in compliance with these requirements.

Together, these principles ensure that Early Voting will accomplish its purpose of increasing participation by those for whom the present system constructs unfair barriers to participation.

These Early Voting proposals represent real progress. And by requiring the State to pick up the cost, we avoid placing an unfair and unfunded burden on municipalities, especially those that may already be facing other challenges inherent in providing services to economically disadvantaged residents.

We commend the Committee on doing the essential work of making real the intent of the voters, who by a strong majority in November 2022, asked us to make early voting available. We look forward to continuing our support for these efforts as one or more of these bills move forward in the process and Connecticut joins the 46 other states that have adopted this important expansion in the freedom to vote.

Respectfully submitted by the Advisory Board of Common Cause in Connecticut,

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