



Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of

House Joint Resolution 58 Proposing A State Constitutional Amendment to Allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting

House Joint Resolution 59 Approving an Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting

Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 19, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony **in support of House Joint Resolution 58 Proposing A State Constitutional Amendment to Allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting and House Joint Resolution 59 Approving An Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting.**

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets, in 2020, the Foundation distributed a record-breaking \$52 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$837 million since its founding in 1925.

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility for Black and Latinx residents of Greater Hartford, the Hartford Foundation supports **civic and resident engagement** in our region.

Community voice and leadership is a priority for the Hartford Foundation, one that runs throughout each of our strategic priorities. Our commitment to civic engagement may take the form of voting, participating in local government, volunteering or sharing ideas on how resources could be used to make our community a better place. Resident engagement efforts seek to develop resident leadership and opportunities for collective action. The Foundation believes that it is vital that policy decisions are informed by a diverse group of residents who are impacted by the actions at City Hall and the State Capitol. In doing this work, we hope to enhance inclusive opportunities for residents of our region to create positive change.

In 2018, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving launched its first nonpartisan voter registration initiative for Greater Hartford. Known as Get Out the Vote (GOTV), the objective was to reach out to populations least likely to participate in federal, state and local elections: young adults, Latinx and Black residents and people living in high poverty neighborhoods. Thirteen community-based nonprofits successfully registered over 1,000 new voters and received 1,500 pledges to participate in the 2018 elections. Building off lessons learned from the 2018 effort, the following year, the

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Hartford Foundation awarded 20 grants totaling \$448,400 over eighteen months to support voter engagement in 2019 and 2020 and Census participation activities. This past summer, amidst COVID restriction requirements, the Foundation provided additional grants to five organizations to provide additional support for socially distanced civic engagement and voter engagement activities.

The Hartford Foundation remains committed to raising up community voice, such as participation in the electoral process, recognizing the vital role community engagement plays in creating and sustaining more vibrant communities. As the community foundation for Greater Hartford, we believe we have a role to fill in helping local nonprofit organizations deliver the education and outreach efforts that encourage people to register, learn about the issues that affect them and cast their ballot on Election Day.

It is for these reasons the Foundation offers its support for **House Joint Resolution No. 58 Proposing A State Constitutional Amendment to Allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting**. One of the few silver linings of 2020 was the way Connecticut policymakers and residents stepped up to make sure their voices were heard through their participation in 2020 election. With concerns about the spread of COVID-19, the legislature in its wisdom did all it could to make voting safe and convenient and provide people with assurances that every vote was counted, even in the midst of a global pandemic.

With one of the highest turnouts in state history, more than 650,000 people safely and conveniently cast their ballots by taking advantage of the availability of no-cost, postage-paid, absentee ballots. This is not to say these efforts didn't face significant challenges, including placing a strain on local registrars of voters who had to contend with counting an unprecedented number of absentee ballots. However, despite these issues, hundreds of thousands of people were able to vote safely by mail. A State Constitutional Amendment to Allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting would make such efforts in the future even more successful, with the advantage of increased time to prepare.

The Foundation also supports **House Joint Resolution Approving An Amendment to the State Constitution to Allow for Early Voting**, which would allow the legislature to provide Connecticut voters the opportunity to cast their votes prior to Election Day. Connecticut is one of just six states in the nation that does not allow early voting. We know that for many residents, particularly adults in low-income working families, have limited flexibility to go and cast their votes on Election Day. By creating additional days for people to vote, including weekends, Connecticut can ensure that every eligible voter has the ability to make their voices heard at the ballot box.

Prior to COVID, five states were already conducting elections entirely by mail with another 29 states and Washington D.C. offering "no-excuse" absentee voting to all voters. With adequate resources and preparation, there is no reason why Connecticut can't do the same.

The Foundation is eager to partner with legislators and advocates to support efforts to ensure that all residents have a voice on critical issues and the solutions that are responsive to and reflective of our entire community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.