



ACLU of Connecticut Rise PAC
Secretary of the State Candidate Commitment Survey

Accessibility of Registration and Voting

1. Will you support modernizing Connecticut’s automatic voter registration system by adopting a more expansive back-end opt-out system like the Oregon model¹ that automatically registers Connecticut residents to vote with the option to opt-out and protections for people who are undocumented or ineligible to vote? Please give a clear “yes” or “no” to the question and any explanation to support your response.
2. Assuming voters approve of the constitutional amendment to permit early voting, will you commit to supporting early voting implementation legislation that starts in-person early voting at least 30 days before Connecticut elections with guaranteed weekend voting days?²
3. Across the nation and in Connecticut, people in low-income areas are less likely to register to vote in comparison to the national average. Because of historic and continuing racism in housing policy and access, Black and Latinx residents who are low-income in Connecticut are more likely to live in public housing than white people.³ New Haven has successfully adopted a motor-voter style automatic voter registration policy that provides tenants the opportunity to register to vote at each new lease-up or recertification. Will you support legislation that addresses the disproportionate under-registration of low-income people by requiring housing authorities to provide voter registration applications to prospective tenants? Please give a clear “yes” or “no” to the question and any explanation to support your response.

¹ Motor Voter Act of 2015, H.B. 2177, 78th Oregon Legislative Assembly (2015).

² *Early Voting*, BALLOTEDIA (accessed Sept. 6, 2022), https://ballotpedia.org/Early_voting; *Early In-Person Voting*, NAT’L CONF. ST. LEGISLATURES (Aug. 30, 2022), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/early-voting-in-state-elections.aspx>.

³ *Cf. Potential Voters Map*, CT DATA COLLABORATIVE (last accessed Sept. 6, 2022), <https://www.ctdata.org/potential-voters>; *CT Opportunity Map*, CONN. HOUSING FINANCE AUTHORITY (last accessed Sept. 6, 2022), <https://www.chfa.org/about-us/ct-opportunity-map/>; Mary Buchanan & Mark Abraham, *Rising Neighborhood Income Inequality in Connecticut*, CONN. DATA HAVEN (June 6, 2013), <https://www.ctdatahaven.org/reports/rising-neighborhood-income-inequality-connecticut>.

4. Year after year, election management in Connecticut result in long lines, particularly in urban areas where Connecticut's voters of color are most concentrated. The availability of secure ballot drop boxes is a means to expand options for voting and in turn decrease voter wait times. States that regularly vote by mail, like Washington, have used ballot drop boxes with great success, both in terms of use and security.⁴ Would you support legislation making the use of secure ballot drop boxes permanent⁵?

Voting and the Criminal Legal System

5. Every person that is 18 years of age or older in Connecticut should have a Constitutional right to vote, including people who are incarcerated. Will you support legislation which, like Vermont and Maine, extends voting rights to all people who are incarcerated in our state by 2024? Please give a clear "yes" or "no" to the question and any explanation to support your response.
6. In Connecticut, approximately 30 percent of people detained pretrial or who are incarcerated for misdemeanors retain their right to vote.⁶ People who are incarcerated and have the right to vote often cannot because our state has no standardized process for incarcerated people to exercise this fundamental right. This results in an onerous administrative processes that can require extensive back-and-forth mailing, which discourages voting. Will you support legislation that standardizes the absentee voting process for people who are incarcerated and increases voter registration outreach to Department of Correction facilities? Please give a clear "yes" or "no" to the question and any explanation to support your response.

Modernization of Voting and Improving Voter Confidence

7. Connecticut is one of fifteen states that do not permit no-excuse absentee voting.⁷ Will you support a constitutional amendment to permit no-excuse absentee voting? Please give a clear "yes" or "no" to the question and any explanation to support your response.

⁴ *Ballot Drop Box Usage by Year*, WASH. SECRETARY OF STATE, <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/research/ballot-drop-box-usage-by-year.aspx>; Melissa Santos, *Security and Ballot Drop Boxes: How it Works in WA*, CROSSCUT (Aug. 19, 2020), <https://crosscut.com/politics/2020/08/security-and-ballot-drop-boxes-how-it-works-wa>.

⁵ *Ballot Drop Box*, U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (last accessed Sept. 8, 2022), https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/vbm/Ballot_Drop_Box.pdf.

⁶ See Sam Kuhn et al., *Improving Access to Voting in Connecticut Jails and Prisons*, CONN. SENTENCING COMM'N (May 2022), <https://ctsentencingcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Improving-Access-to-Voting-in-CT-Jails-Prisons.pdf>.

⁷ See *Table 1: States with No-Excuse Absentee Voting*, NAT'L CONF. STATE LEGISLATURES (July 12, 2022), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-1-states-with-no-excuse-absentee-voting.aspx>;

Table 2: Excuses to Vote Absentee, NAT'L CONF. STATE LEGISLATURES (July 12, 2022), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-2-excuses-to-vote-absentee.aspx>.

8. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many states including Connecticut adopted forms of online ballot tracking. Currently, Connecticut permits voters to track their ballot by entering their information in the state voter lookup system; voters are not proactively notified during the process and must instead take it upon themselves to search for their ballot status. Nine states, including Rhode Island, have implemented advanced ballot tracking systems, such as BallotTrax, which has resulted in 78 percent average voter turnout compared to the national average of 55 percent.⁸ Will you support the modernization of Connecticut’s online ballot tracking by adopting an automated system such as BallotTrax? Please give a clear “yes” or “no” to the question and any explanation to support your response.

9. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Connecticut experimented with no-excuse absentee voting through a combination of executive orders and emergency legislation during the 2020 presidential primary election and the general election. By all measures, this was an enormous success: approximately 35 percent of voters voted by absentee ballot—about four times more than the typical absentee voting rate. At the same time, the Secretary of the State’s office halved its typical absentee ballot rejection rate.⁹ This experiment proved that expanding voting options is both widely popular with voters and extremely successful administratively. Will you support the automatic mailing of absentee ballot applications for every election? Please give a clear “yes” or “no” to the question and any explanation to support your response.

Rooting Out Racism in Voting

10. In 2022, the legislature considered the Connecticut Voting Rights Act (SB 471),¹⁰ which was an attempt to codify and expand on provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act in order to eliminate the persistent structural electoral processes in the state that continue to prevent people, especially Black and Latinx people, from voting. Connecticut’s history as the most regressive voting rights state in New England, sometimes ranked fourth worst in the nation,¹¹ demonstrates the need for continued skepticism of any belief that voting rights are uniquely strong in this state. Will you support efforts to codify and expand elements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in

⁸ See *BallotTrax Releases National Data on the Impact of Mail-In Voting on the 2020 Presidential Election*, BALLOTTRAX (Nov. 5, 2020), available at <https://ballottrax.com/ballottrax-releases-national-data-on-impact-of-mail-in-voting/>; Dave Beaudoin, *44 States Allow Voters to Check the Status of Their Ballot Online*, BALLOTPEDIA NEWS (Oct. 28, 2020), <https://news.ballotpedia.org/2020/10/28/44-states-allow-voters-to-check-the-status-of-their-ballot-online/>.

⁹ Press Release, Secretary of the State of Connecticut, *Historic Number of Votes Cast by Absentee Ballot in the 2020 Election* (Dec. 3, 2020), <https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Press-Releases/2020-Press-Releases/Historic-Number-of-Votes-Cast-by-Absentee-Ballot-in-the-2020-Election>.

¹⁰ Connecticut Voting Rights Act, S.B. 471 (2022), <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2022/FC/PDF/2022SB-00471-R000454-FC.PDF>.

¹¹ See, e.g., Bill Theobald, *The Six Toughest States for Voting During the Pandemic*, FULCRUM (Apr. 29, 2020), <https://thefulcrum.us/voting/voting-during-coronavirus>; Russell Berman, *The Blue States That Make It Hardest to Vote*, ATLANTIC (Apr. 15, 2021), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/04/democrats-voting-rights-contradiction/618599/>.

state law? Please give a clear “yes” or “no” to the question and any explanation to support your response.

- a. Will you support legislation that holds local governments with histories of voter discrimination accountable by requiring municipalities to demonstrate that changes to their voting policies will not result in disenfranchisement before the change may occur?
- b. Will you support legislation that would grant the State Elections Enforcement Commission and people harmed by voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction a civil right of action in courts to hold those that interfere with our right to vote accountable?
- c. In order to evaluate whether municipalities are in compliance with Connecticut Voting Rights Act standards, the state must modernize its ability to collect and evaluate disaggregated data on population and voter demographics, such as race and languages spoken at the municipal level, as well as records of the municipality’s relevant electoral practices while also preserving the privacy of voters. Will you support legislation to create a central hub for disaggregated election data and demographic information within the Office of the Secretary of the State?
- d. Although the federal Voting Rights Act codified language-related assistance in voting, the bar to trigger coverage is high and results in inadequate language assistance for substantial populations . Will you support legislation that would require a municipality to provide language-related assistance in voting at a lower minimum threshold than current federal Voting Rights Act standards?¹²

¹² See *S.B. 471 OFA Fiscal Note*, CONN. OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS (2022), available at <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2022/FN/PDF/2022SB-00471-R000454-FN.PDF>.