



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6408, An Act Requiring Housing Authorities to Provide Voter Registration Applications to Prospective Tenants

Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Kelly McConney Moore, and I am the interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 6408, An Act Requiring Housing Authorities to Provide Voter Registration Applications to Prospective Tenants.

The ACLU-CT strongly supports removing barriers to the foundational cornerstone of our democracy: the right to vote. Right now, due to systemic inequities and barriers to access, the right to vote is functionally denied to many people. This shows up in the disparities in voter registration among different populations. For example, nationwide, only 60% of people with low incomes were registered to vote in 2016, compared with 85% of higher income people.¹ In addition, even when people living in public housing are registered voters, they are fourteen percent less likely to vote compared to other voters.² Living in public housing is a stronger predictor of lower turnout than age, sex, or party identification.³ Because of historic and continuing racism in housing policy and access, Black and Latinx Connecticut residents are more likely to live in public housing than white people.⁴ In other

¹ National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Our Homes, Our Votes," *available at* <https://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org/housing-ballots>.

² John Ray, "The crisis of voter turnout in public housing." Data for Progress, Mar. 20, 2019, *available at* <https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2019/3/18/the-crisis-of-voter-turnout-in-public-housing>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ "Connecticut Resident Characteristics Report." HUD, 2019-2021, *available at* https://hudapps.hud.gov/public/picj2ee/Mtcsrerc?category=rcr_familystatus&download=false&count=0.

words, if people living in subsidized housing are less likely to be registered to vote, this impact disproportionately excludes Black and brown people from the franchise. Accordingly, focusing on registering people who seek housing through housing authorities provides an outsized benefit to Black and brown people. Such policies are necessary to create equity in voting rights, given the long and shameful history in Connecticut and nationwide of blocking access to voting for people who are not white.

Because the right to vote is a fundamental part of America's democracy, registering to vote should be a simple task. When people interact with housing authorities to seek other services and assistance, it makes sense to provide voter registration applications in these locations. Some of the people visiting these authorities may not have another readily accessible opportunity to register to vote. Providing this easy opportunity for registration could increase both the number of registered voters in Connecticut and voter participation in elections, especially among a group of people (those living in subsidized housing) who are less likely to register to begin with.⁵

Though we support House Bill 6408, the ACLU-CT stresses to this Committee that automatic voter registration is an even simpler, more accessible policy solution. Automatic voter registration ensures that every resident who is qualified to register to vote is registered unless they opt out. We encourage members of this Committee and the General Assembly to support efforts to make voter registration automatic. For now, though, House Bill 6408 is a good step towards getting an under-registered population registered to vote and we urge this Committee to support it.

⁵ The motor voter provisions of the National Voter Registration Act have been estimated to have increased voter participation among low-income Americans by up to almost 9%. Danielle Root & Liz Kennedy, "Increasing Voter Participation in America." Center for American Progress, Jul. 11, 2018, *available at* <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/>