



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 170, An Act Requiring Housing Authorities to Provide Voter Registration Applications to Prospective Tenants

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

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 170, 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, the right to vote is functionally denied to many people. This is evident in the disparities in voter registration across different populations. Nationwide, only 60 percent of people with low incomes were registered to vote in 2016, compared to 85 percent of people with higher incomes.¹ 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 is intuitive 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 easy opportunity for registration could increase both the number of registered voters in Connecticut and voter participation

¹ *Our Homes, Our Votes*, NAT'L LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION (last visited Feb. 28, 2020), available at <https://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org/housing-ballots>.

in elections, especially among a group of people—those living in subsidized housing—who are less likely to register to begin with.²

Though we support Senate Bill 170, 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. But for now, Senate Bill 170 is a good step towards increasing voter participation in an under-registered population and we urge this Committee to support it.

² 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 percent. Danielle Root & Liz Kennedy, *Increasing Voter Participation in America*, CTR FOR AM. PROGRESS (July 11, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/>.