



Legislative Testimony  
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## Written Testimony on House Bill 6660, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify on House Bill 6660, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for General Government.

The ACLU-CT strongly supports measures to ensure equal access to the ballot box, like early voting. Connecticut's limited voting options have historically disproportionately harmed voters of color. In many recent elections, long lines have plagued the same cities and precincts repeatedly—these are always areas with greater concentrations of voters of color.<sup>1</sup> Because of interlocking systems of oppression, voters who are less likely to be able to get to the polls on Election Day—people with little job flexibility, people lacking transportation, and voters who lack language access—are all disproportionately likely to be voters of color.<sup>2</sup> Communities of color are utilizing early voting more and more, leading to a surge in the number of

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<sup>1</sup> M. Keith Chen, Kareem Haggag, Devin G. Pope & Ryne Rohla, *Racial Disparities in Voting Wait Times: Evidence from Smartphone Data*, CORNELL UNIVERSITY ARXIV.1909.00024, at Table C.3 (Oct. 31, 2020), <https://arxiv.org/abs/1909.00024>.

<sup>1</sup> Shayla Colon, *From the Sky: Drone Photos Capture Long Voting Line In CT*, CT POST (Nov. 3, 2020), <https://www.ctpost.com/elections/slideshow/Norwalk-voters-endure-long-lines-and-cold-212063.php>; *Polling Location in Hartford Had Long Lines on Election Day*, NBC CONNECTICUT (Nov. 4, 2020), <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/polling-location-in-hartford-had-long-lines-on-election-day/2355523/>; Jack Kramer, *In Connecticut, Long Lines and Problems at a Hartford Polling Place*, CT NEWS JUNKIE (Nov. 8, 2016 at 8:47 AM), <https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2016/11/08/smooth-start-to-voting-in-tumultuous-year/>; Dan Corcoran, *Hartford Registrars of Voters Office Fined \$9,600 for 2014 Election Debacle*, NBC CONNECTICUT (Aug. 17, 2017 at 7:15PM), <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/hartford-registrars-of-voters-office-fined-9600-for-2014-election-debacle/20665/>; *Bridgeport Voting Extended to 10pm Because of Ballot Shortage*, GREENWICH TIMES (Nov. 2, 2010), <https://www.greenwichtime.com/news/article/Bridgeport-voting-extended-to-10-p-m-because-of-791129.php>.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Vann R. Newkirk II, *Voter Suppression is Warping Democracy*, ATLANTIC (July 17, 2018), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/poll-prri-voter-suppression/565355/>.

Black people voting.<sup>3</sup> Enacting an early voting plan that is truly equitable and accessible will accordingly confer an outsized benefit on voters of color. The ACLU-CT urges this Committee to fully fund an equitable early voting plan, and recommends the following early voting policies:

- **Allow for at least two weeks of early voting days.** Almost half of the states with IPEV specify that early voting begins between two and three weeks before Election Day during a general election. The national average of IPEV days is 23, with the average early voting period beginning 30 days before election day.<sup>4</sup> All nine states with the highest rates of IPEV in the 2008 and 2012 elections fell within this range.<sup>5</sup>
  - In Kansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, where the states require minimal days of early voting, turnout was well below the average turnout in both the nine top performing states and the national average.<sup>6</sup>
- **Provide at least one weekend early voting, including the last weekend before election day.** Weekend voting days draw in voters who are less likely to vote during the weekday due to work schedules.<sup>7</sup> In some jurisdictions, weekends are the peak voting days, with the last weekend before election day experiencing the biggest early voting turnout.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-seven states and D.C. require IPEV on one Saturday, with a maximum of 14 hours and a medium of 10 hours available to vote.<sup>9</sup> Ten states and D.C. require IPEV on one Sunday. Weekend hours typically vary in many states depending on the kind of election.<sup>10</sup> In states with the highest early voting turnout, there are statutory mandates for at least one weekend day of early voting.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Diana Kasdan, *Early Voting: What Works*, BRENNAN CTR. JUST., at 12 (2013).

<sup>4</sup> *Early In-Person Voting*, NAT'L CONF. ST. LEG. (Aug. 30, 2022), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>.

<sup>5</sup> Kasdan, *supra* note 3, at 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Kristin Sullivan et al., *Proposals for Early In-Person Voting in the State of Connecticut*, CTR. ELECTION INNOVATION & RES. at 26 (Dec. 2022).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Kasdan, *supra* note 3.

- **Set a consistent number of minimum daily hours for each day of early voting and provide extended hours outside of standard business hours.** The number of hours in an early voting day significantly contributes to early voting usage. States with high rates of early voter turnout, like NM, TN, and TX, offer significantly more hours than their statutory minimum.<sup>12</sup>
  - Research confirms that extending IPEV hours can increase turnout. A study of early voting in 2008 in 117 of 159 of Georgia’s counties concluded that “increasing the hours of operation for early voting sites appears to be the most cost-effective measure for boosting turnout.”<sup>13</sup>
  - Expanded IPEV hours would also benefit voters in rural Connecticut, who may have to travel longer distances to the closest IPEV location.
- **Distribute early voting places fairly and equitably.** Laws in the states with the highest early voting rates are more likely to set out rules either about the number of early voting locations per county or municipality, how they are to be distributed in each county or municipality, or both. Maximize the number of early voting polling sites, especially in Connecticut’s biggest cities. Consider making early voting sites on major roads, accessible by pedestrians and public transit, with disability access.

Without fully funding for equitable early voting in Connecticut, an early voting plan is meaningless. Connecticut voters have spoken, and early voting is extremely popular and necessary. It is imperative that the General Assembly’s budget reflects the will of the people to create an inclusive, accessible, early voting system in our state. We cannot afford to implement early voting the wrong way. The ACLU-CT urges this Committee and the General Assembly to fully fund an equitable early voting plan that meets our recommendations.

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<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 14.