



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting
Senate Bill 156, An Act Concerning the Secretary of the
State and Absentee Voting and Senate Bill 915, An
Act Concerning Town Clerks and Elections**

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is David McGuire, and I am executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 156, An Act Concerning the Secretary of the State and Absentee Voting and Senate Bill 915, An Act Concerning Town Clerks and Elections.

As an organization committed to the rights and freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution, the ACLU-CT strongly supports measures to ensure equal access to the ballot box. Voting is the foundation of our democracy and a fundamental right that establishes our essential freedoms. Providing additional ways to request absentee ballots and removing barriers to voting absentee would strengthen both the representation of our democracy and our state.

Senate Bill 156 and Senate Bill 915 would enable a greater number of individuals to cast their vote and have their voices heard. By providing electors with the opportunity to electronically request an absentee ballot through the Secretary of the State's website and eliminating the requirement to mail a completed absentee ballot application to the town clerk, even if the absentee ballot applicant already submitted a copy by fax or other electronic means, these bills would help ensure that each voter has an equal and fair chance of exercising their voting rights.

While allowing requests for an absentee ballot through the internet and only requiring absentee voters to fax or send in electronically their absentee ballot applications would benefit all individuals, both bills would most significantly impact those who are vulnerable to disenfranchisement. That includes people living with disabilities, those who lack

transportation, people who do not have childcare, people who have unpredictable work schedules, and those who need to work throughout Election Day in order to financially support their families. These bills would also benefit out-of-state students, who are often unable to vote the day of an election in their hometown.

A study on United States voters found that individuals with disabilities are both less likely to vote and less likely to be registered to vote than those living without a disability. Individuals with disabilities also report having more difficulties with, and anxiety about, casting their vote. For some individuals, using the voting system can be a cognitive or physical challenge, while others fear the loud, chaotic experience of the polls. Additionally, college students face a number of hurdles to casting their votes. When voting at school and using their university address, rather than their home address, students often report being questioned about their official residence or even being turned away.

Studies have also shown that those voting by absentee ballot put more research into deciding which candidate will earn their vote. Rather than facing the pressure to both get to the polls on Election Day and cast a vote for a candidate they support, voting by absentee ballot allows individuals to vote on their own time and enables them to make a more informed decision. As those elected are a direct representation of the people, providing access to the ballot through various means not only enables a greater number of people to cast their vote, but it also results in representation that better reflects the values and goals of the people.

Voting is fundamental to our democracy, and providing opportunities for people to vote absentee only makes our democracy stronger. The ACLU-CT strongly encourages this committee to support Senate Bill 156 and Senate Bill 915.