



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 5320, An Act Concerning
Accessibility to Voting for Individuals with Certain Disabilities, with
Suggested Amendment**

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections 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 5320, An Act Concerning Accessibility to Voting for Individuals with Certain Disabilities, with a suggested amendment.

The ACLU-CT strives for a country free of discrimination against people with disabilities, where people with disabilities are valued, integrated members of society who have full access to fundamental rights and civic engagement. Voting is the linchpin right in a representative democracy: it is through this right that all others are protected and secured. Yet accessibility persists as a problem throughout society for people with disabilities, including in the voting booth. In 2020, when absentee voting was expanded due to COVID-19, voters with visual impairments experienced difficulties with both certain forms being only printed and with filing absentee ballots.¹ Some suggested accommodations removed voters' autonomy and independence, instead making the only option for voters with disabilities to rely on other people.²

¹ Greg Little, "Persons with disabilities face challenges voting." WTIC News Talk 1080, Oct. 27, 2020, *available at* <https://www.radio.com/wtic/news/local/advocate-for-disabled-say-they-face-challenges-vvoting>.

² Jodi Latina, "Blind community wants equal access to absentee ballots in a COVID-19 free environment." WTNH New 8, Jul. 30, 2020, *available at* <https://www.wtnh.com/news/politics/blind-community-wants-equal-access-to-absentee-ballots-in-a-covid-free-environment/>.

We support House Bill 5320 as a step towards solutions for people with disabilities. Section 2 provides for accessible voting devices in each polling place – the kind of accommodation that helps voters with disabilities have the independence and autonomy some solutions would deny them. We also support Section 1, which would create a task force to study the problem and make recommendations to this Committee. This task force could provide a roadmap for Connecticut to start to move towards solutions, but as currently constituted, the task force is inadequate. The task force does not mandate that individuals with disabilities be included as members of the task force; this is a serious failing. Impacted people are the ones whose voices ought to be most centered. We strongly urge this Committee to amend Section 1 to provide that many of the identified appointees be people with disabilities themselves or people representing groups that advocate for people with disabilities. Without this input, the recommendations from the task force will almost certainly be imperfect and exclusionary.

We thus urge this Committee to amend Section 1 to identify that certain appointees be people with disabilities or advocates for them, and, with that change, to support this bill.