



## **Resolution Proposing a State Constitutional Amendment to Permit Early Voting (H.J.R. 28)**

Connecticut is one of 20 states that still requires voters to provide an excuse in order to vote by absentee. However, unlike Connecticut, 7 of them have some other form of early voting option.

In October 2016, some experts predicted that more than 50 million voters would cast their ballots in some manner other than appearing at their polling place on Election Day. In 2012, over 1/3 of voters -- more than 46 million people --- voted early.

According to a 2016 Gallup poll, 80 percent of Americans support early voting. This support remains consistent among a range of demographic and political groups. For example, according to Gallup, 74 percent of Republicans, 80 percent of Independents and 85 percent of Democrats support early voting.

Because our state constitution includes language prohibiting early voting we must first amend the constitution. This is the first step in that process.

Early voting critics will raise issues that do not have to be resolved until any enabling legislation is passed. That process will take several years, and so we will have time to resolve any concerns.

### **Summary**

- The resolution removes language that prevents us from having early voting in CT. Specifically, it modifies Section 7, Article Sixth.
- It changes the qualification of who can vote before Election Day from “unable to appear” to “do not appear”, making it a choice of convenience rather than being out of town.
- The amendment ALLOWS for at least 2 and no more than 5 days of early voting. After the amendment passes the legislature would make the determination of the number of days.
- The amendment says that the 2 to 5 days of early voting will take place within 2 weeks of Election Day. This allows for enabling legislation to work out when exactly they would occur. Early voting could be one long GOTV period in the days leading up to election, or there could be a break between the early voting days and Election Day, which is not uncommon.
- The amendment does NOT say that all polling places are required to be open on early voting days, and it does NOT address the staffing of early voting sites.
- The amendment does NOT require early voting to observe the 6:00 am to 8:00 pm Election Day schedule.
- The amendment does require that early voting days have at least 8 hours of availability.

### **What exactly will the amendment do?**

The state constitution requires that voters “appear on Election Day” unless they meet one of the requirements for an absentee ballot. The proposed constitutional amendment would allow for up to 5 days of early voting within 2 weeks of Election Day. They may be the days immediately preceding Election Day, or it may be the two weekends leading up to Election Day or some other configuration. Also, allowing early voting does not have to mean opening all of the polling places that would be used for Election Day.

## **Benefits of Early Voting**

- It alleviates long lines at polling places by creating other voting opportunities.
- It accommodates voters who may have to commute long distances; people for whom missing a train or a bus may cause them to miss the chance to vote; and those people who may lose wages if they take time from their work day.
- It accommodates elderly or sick voters who may have “good days and bad days” and not feel well enough to make it to the polls on the assigned day. Instead they can vote when they know they feel well.
- It is wildly popular among voters. More and more people take advantage of the convenience of early voting with every election cycle.
- It influences candidate behaviors in a positive way. Candidates conduct voter mobilization efforts throughout the early voting period, which ultimately leads to increased voter contact and in turn increased voter turnout.
- The early voting process allows election administrators to “ease into” Election Day; troubleshoot problems and fix them without the constraints of a massive one-day event.
- Churches and other organizations have created a new tradition of voting together as a community with efforts like “souls to the polls”.

## **How is this constitutional amendment different than the one on the ballot in 2014?**

In 2014 there was a similar constitutional amendment on the ballot. That amendment was broader in scope and lacked specificity. Essentially it proposed to remove restrictive language from the constitution so that the legislature could pass a law “allowing a person to vote without appearing at a polling place on Election Day.” Because we did not articulate what we wanted the end product to be (early voting for 5 days, or to be able to vote by mail without requiring a reason) the voters did not have a specific idea to latch onto. This proposed amendment answers those questions and provides some specifics.

## **How much does early voting cost?**

There is no hard evidence that early voting dramatically increases the cost of elections. The amendment allows for enabling legislation to consider a minimal number of voting locations for early voting, rather than operating all polling places. The amendment only requires a modest number of early voting days, as opposed to multiple weeks.

## **How soon can we pass early voting?**

The earliest possible time we could pass early voting legislation would be 2019, and more likely 2021. There are two possible timelines for passage. If the resolution passes with support from  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members of each chamber, then it would appear on the 2018 ballot.

If the resolution passes with a simple majority in each chamber, then it will have to be reintroduced after the next General Assembly convenes (2019) and passed again in each chamber. After passage of the second consecutive General Assembly it would then be placed on the 2020 ballot for voters to approve.