

Hello Esteemed Members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I am a resident of Bridgeport, CT and Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now, a grassroots org that builds civic engagement in our city. My colleague Gemeem Davis testified earlier. Thank you for your leadership on LCO 3576, we strongly support this bill because we believe in expanding voting rights, and we shouldn't have to choose between our health and exercising our right to vote.

But, the people of Bridgeport - many of whom are severely impacted by the racial disparities of this disease - still need your help! It is widely known that the voters of Bridgeport have for generations suffered under absentee ballot fraud and abuse.

Last fall, after our Democratic primary election, there were shocking disparities in AB votes cast for Line A candidate versus Line B candidates - and I was part of a canvass team who went out and spoke with voters who voted by the absentee ballot process.

Led by Dr. Vanessa Liles of PT Partners, we created a research protocol designed to reduce and eliminate bias - and conducted highly structured interviews, using a script that pulled questions directly from the AB application and the state statutes. And we targeted voters in the districts in Bridgeport where AB voting disparities were the greatest.

Between September 17th and September 22nd, we spoke with and interviewed a random sample size of over 50 absentee ballot voters. Of those 50+ voters, many shared with us their personal experience with voting by AB in our local primary. We uncovered at least 30 patterns of behaviors by campaign workers, city officials, and Line A candidates that qualify as abusing voters and the absentee ballot process, as well as violating election laws.

**Our canvass revealed systematic targeting and manipulation of some of our most vulnerable citizens; our youth, low-income, disabled, elderly, and monolingual Spanish speaking neighbors - all for the purpose of controlling their vote.**

The data from our canvass was used as evidence presented during the 2019 trial "[Lazar v. Ganim](#)." The trial court judge said - and the Connecticut State Supreme Court agreed - that the evidence presented was "illegal and disturbing." And in the 2017 trial, "Keeley v Ayala," our own Chief of Police was implicated in dispatching an on-duty officer to collect ABs on behalf of our DTC chair - a case that also made its way to the CT Supreme Court and resulted in two new primaries.

And yet despite multiple lawsuits and years of SEEC fines, political operatives in Bridgeport have already taken out over 1,000 absentee ballot applications from the Town Clerk's office.

**While we wait for our legislature to expand voting access through vote-by-mail and early voting, the voters of Bridgeport can't wait - we need an Election Monitor to be included in**

**this bill! As Secretary Merrill said, federal dollars are available to support towns and can be used for this purpose.**

I know you believe strongly in democracy, voting rights, civil rights, and fair elections. Enough is enough, let's restore democracy to Bridgeport and end absentee ballot abuse once and for all.