



**Testimony by Carl Chisem, President
Connecticut Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 511
Municipal Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 506**

Working Draft LCO No. 3576

An Act Concerning Absentee Voting at the 2020 State Election and Election Day Registration

July 21, 2020 Government Administration and Elections Committee Listening Session

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Carl Chisem and I am President of the Connecticut Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 511 and the Municipal Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 506. We represent approximately 6,000 active and retired blue collar maintenance and service State workers as well as 1,000 municipal and Board of Education employees. Our members provide valuable services within our state facilities, many of whom have been working on the frontline during the COVID-19 pandemic. They cook, clean, repair, maintain and deliver in Connecticut's State buildings, hospitals, college campuses, airports, roads, bridges and parks. They represent the true diversity of our great State.

I submit this testimony in strong support of Working Draft LCO No. 3576, An Act Concerning Absentee Voting at the 2020 State Election and Election Day Registration. Voting is a fundamental right that is one of the major forms of communication between citizens and their elected officials. Already, too many hardworking Americans face tremendous barriers that interfere with their ability to cast their ballot. We must not allow COVID-19, and the expected surge of cases in the fall, to prevent anyone from exercising their right to vote.

As elected officials, you have the responsibility to guarantee that we can vote safely without risking our lives or the lives of others. We must not repeat the mistakes made in Wisconsin's primary on April 7th where voters were forced to choose between their well-being and their freedom of speech. Such implicit acts of voter suppression should never be justified or tolerated. With an expanded access to absentee voting in the November general election, eligible voters will not have to sacrifice their health or, in some cases their lives, in order to ensure their voices are heard and their votes are counted.

While adding a one-time COVID-19 excuse to vote absentee for the 2020 general election is a great step forward in safeguarding the validity of our democracy, the bill restricts voting rights beyond the language of Connecticut's state constitution. You must go further and align state statute with the state constitution to ensure voting rights are secured. By removing the four words – "such elector's or person's" – from the draft bill regarding absentee voting, it will ensure that, as long as the pandemic remains in America, eligible Connecticut voters will have access to voting rights, including any possible special elections in early 2021. Future legislatures should not have to continue to come back in for special sessions to protect voting rights.

I ask that you support this language with these slight revisions. Enacting these changes now will protect one's right to vote safely and will prevent any added opportunities of voter suppression at a time when so many are fighting to have their voices heard.

Thank you.