

Government Administration and Elections Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-395 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT STUDYING EFFORTS TO INCREASE VOTER PARTICIPATION AND
AUTHORIZING MUNICIPAL PILOT PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE SUCH

Title: EFFORTS.

Vote Date: 3/23/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/13/2026

File No.: 497

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The voter participation numbers in the state have reached extreme lows in recent years. This bill establishes a task force to study efforts to increase voter participation in Connecticut, including strategies aimed at achieving the long-term goal of one hundred percent voter participation by January 1, 2030. The task force would review approaches used in other jurisdictions, examine potential implementation options, and assess the administrative and budgetary resources municipalities may require if participation increases significantly. This bill also authorizes municipalities to establish pilot programs designed to promote civic participation through outreach and voter education initiatives.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Fernando Betancourt Executive Director of the San Juan Center

Fernando Betancourt supports SB 395 on behalf of San Juan Center. He states that the impact of low voter registration is not evenly distributed in among demographics. Communities of color, young voters, working families, and immigrant communities are often left out of the democratic process. Mr. Betancourt states that in 2024 Connecticut 67% of eligible voters participated in the presidential election and in some local municipal elections have fallen between 10 to 15% participation. In terms of decision making on core aspects of

life such as schools, housing, transportation, and economic opportunity are only made by a small portion of the population in the state. Mr. Betancourt notes that Connecticut ranks 15th in voter participation nationwide, but several states such as Minnesota, Maine, and Colorado consistently achieve a higher voter turnout. Mr. Betancourt suggests including these states as an area of study, as well as expanding pre-registration for 16 to 17 year olds, and strengthening civic education. He notes that voter studies were conducted at Harvard Kennedy School, which reported that if Connecticut reached 90% voter turnout, over 400,000 of those voters would be young voters and over 100,000 of those voters would be voters of color.

Aaron Goode New Haven Votes Coalition

Aaron Goode supports SB 395 on behalf of New Haven Votes Coalition but states that they feel it should be expanded upon to include a more holistic approach to voter participation. Mr. Goode states that medium to large cities face a significant gap in voter turnout in comparison to more typically affluent suburban or even rural areas. He notes that municipal voter turnout has dropped 20% in New Haven alone between 2001 and the mid-2010s. Some attempts to rectify this situation are unique public financing programs like the New Haven Democracy Fund which had improved candidate, donor, and voter participation. However, this fund has only made marginal changes and has not been able to head off the negative trends in voter turnout, which only reproduces historical inequalities. In conclusion, Mr. Goode shares other topics of study consolidation of some elections, including alignment of municipal and state elections in even-number years, the impacts of ranked choice voting and proportional representation, wider availability of public financing of elections, particularly at the local level, nonpartisan elections; particularly at the local level, open primaries, expanding automatic voter registration (AVR), and introducing "pre-registration" of 16-year-olds through constitutional amendment.

CJ McBride Public Policy Team for the Greater Hartford Gives Foundation

CJ McBride is part of the public policy team for the Greater Hartford Gives Foundation, formerly known as the Hartford Foundation for Public Living. He supports SB 395 on behalf of GHGF. Mr. McBride stated that, "In Hartford the lowest rates of voter participation are people of color, especially Black and Latine voters; young voters between the ages of 18-29; and residents of the City of Hartford. Despite best efforts of nonpartisan and political organizations seeking to engage voters, CT Data Collaborative's 2024 Election Analysis showed that voter participation declined statewide from 80 percent in the 2020 presidential election to 76 percent in 2024. East Hartford saw a significant decline, with turnout dropping 15 percentage-points, from 66 percent to 51 percent. Hartford's turnout has consistently declined over the last three presidential elections, from 63 percent in 2016, to 50 percent in 2020, to only 43 percent in 2024." He also stated that voter participation in Hartford's November 2023 municipal election was less than 15 percent of all eligible voters and reports highlight voter apathy, feelings of mistrust of the political system, and lack of voter knowledge as factors. In conclusion, Mr. McBride also states that engaging residents who are underrepresented, will require nonpartisan education on the voting process and local issues which will ensure residents understand what they see on ballots and why voting in municipal, state, and national elections, matters. It also requires addressing transportation, language barriers, adult literacy challenges, and ensuring that there are voting options accessible for people unable to take time off to vote.

Carole Mulready Retired Non-partisan Groups

Carole Mulready stated that she is a resident with a long history of civic engagement. She states that she has served as an elected town official, election moderator, and as an active member of the League of Women Voters. She notes that she does not believe the voter turnout in the state is sufficient even at the hyper local level where the political process is meant to be more accessible to the public in terms of making contact with elected officials. Ms. Mulready suggest the following areas of consideration for the study, education that is more interactive than required high school civics lessons, determining why information concerning voting is not making a lasting impact on voter behavior, understanding where voter patterns and turnout are better both In USA and abroad, and Involve persons beyond elected officials and academics in any study.

Melvette Hill Executive Director of the CWCSEO

Melvette Hill is the Executive Director of Commission on Women Children Seniors Equity and Opportunity and supports SB 395 on behalf of the commission. She states their mission is to identify and analyze disparities affecting women, children, seniors, and communities of color, and to provide policymakers with research and recommendations that support equitable participation in all aspects of civic life. She states that from CWCSEO's perspective, this proposal is significant because civic participation is directly connected to equitable representation, and broader participation equates to a more representative system. Ms. Hill states that although Connecticut performs above the national average in voter turnout during presidential elections, participation in midterm elections is significantly lower and participation levels after the legislature's move to expand access to the election process, suggests there may still be opportunities to examine additional strategies to strengthen civic participation across the state. The task force will give the legislature an opportunity to examine these questions through a comprehensive and evidence-based process. She continues on to state that research examining possible higher participation scenarios in Connecticut also suggests that increased civic engagement could significantly broaden representation. Analysis conducted by researchers affiliated with the Harvard Kennedy School estimated that policies encouraging participation levels approaching ninety percent turnout could increase statewide voter participation by approximately 430,000 voters, including substantial increases among younger voters and voters from historically underrepresented communities. Ms. Hill highlights that S.B. 395 does not mandate immediate changes to election policy but establishes a process for gathering data, reviewing best practices, and engaging election administrators and other stakeholders before policy decisions are made. This approach allows the General Assembly to consider potential strategies with a clearer understanding of their feasibility, administrative implications, and potential impact. In conclusion Ms. Hill says that CWCSEO respectfully recommends that the committee consider including the Commission as a formal member of the task force. Under their statutory mandate, the Commission is charged with examining policies affecting women, children, seniors, and communities of color while identifying opportunities to advance equity and civic participation across the state. Because disparities in civic engagement and voter participation often intersect with the communities we study and serve, CWCSEO could provide valuable research and policy analysis to support the task force's work.

Miles Rapoport Executive Director 100 Democracy

Miles Rapoport supports SB 395 and states that the legislature has made significant strides to expand voter participation by adopting early voting and making mail in voting more accessible, but there are other policies that have been adopted by other states, and by

counties and municipalities, that can expand voter participation even further. HE cites programs like pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds or lowering the voting age to 16 or 17; state-published voter guides, and separating voting rights forfeiture and criminal justice convictions. Mr. Rapoport also makes note of national programs in other countries that the Task force may consider like universal voting, making voting a required civic duty, (similar to jury duty which has been practice in this country for 100 years), adoption of proportional systems of representation, and provision of national identification cards. In conclusion, he references his time as a in the General Assembly and states that, “policies that reform elections, here in the Land of Steady Habits, take time to be discussed and debated. The Task Force is a way of beginning the discussion of policies for the future.”

Elizabeth Swietek Co-President Greater Hartford LWV

Elizabeth Swietek Co-President of the League of Women Voters supports SB 395. She states that the League of Women Voters has championed an active and well-informed participation in government. She states that the voter turnout in Connecticut is inconsistent and has reached percentages as low as between 10 and 15%. She states that she hopes a study such as this can illuminate other pathways to increased and sustained voter turnout.

David Wineberg Policy Strategist Protect Democracy United

David Wienberg a Policy Strategist testified in support of SB 395 a cross-partisan 501(c)(4) organization that seeks to strengthen the democratic and representative institutions of government. He states that the American people must be more fully represented. He states that finding commonsense ways to widen participation in our elections and other civic processes, so that all people from different sectors of American society are well reflected, both in elective office and in policy output. Mr. Wienberg suggests looking at universal civic duty voting, similar to practices that have worked well in other democracies such as Australia, Greece, and much of South America. he argues that our government routinely requires other forms of institutional participation in U.S. democracy, such as jury duty and selective service registration. He also notes that it may be worth researching some form of universal voting that includes numerous exemptions like an option to leave a ballot blank, a light-handed approach to enforcement. He concludes his statement by saying that in light of the low rate of voter turnout in the state that any effort to increase voter participation is greatly appreciated.

Stacey Zimmerman Deputy Director SEIU Connecticut State Council

Stacey Zimmerman is the Deputy Director of the Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council, which represents 75,000 members across the state of Connecticut in public and private sectors. She supports SB 395 on behalf of SEIU CT State Council. She shares concern of low voter participation but urges the legislature to consider what changes can come at the state level, and at the local municipal level. She states that municipalities should also be able to pilot new ideas for raising participation rates. She notes that the task force will allow us to learn what else we can do to increase voter participation and engagement.

Sarah Ganong State Director Connecticut Working Families Power

Sarah Ganong supports SB 395 on behalf of Connecticut Working Families Power. Ms. Ganong states that this bill would allow Connecticut to have the opportunity to lead the country in discussing and understanding the effect of 100% participation in our democracy.

She states that setting this universal participation target, and studying it more broadly, could lead the legislature to discover additional reforms that could alleviate issues residents may have with participating in any part of the civic process.

Ms. Ganong suggested a few areas of study for the task force to consider. They are, expanding civic education through K-12 curriculum additions and state funding, allowing pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds, extending automatic voter registration to all other state agencies beyond the DMV, expanding mail voting, expanding early voting, including substantial increases in funding for public communications, and allowing all citizens to vote, including those with felony convictions and all those currently incarcerated.

Evelyn O'Kane

Evelyn Kane stresses her support for SB 395 and states that democracy relies on public knowledge and participation to be successful. She states that in 2024 voter turnout in the state reached 67.1%, which was only 3.34 percentage points above the national average. Ms. O'Kane continues by noting that if both the state and national average is below 70% then over one 1/4th of the population is not being represented in the election process. She states that currently there is no way of determining if this is by choice or lack of access to voting and registration resources. She argues that the implementation of a task force to conduct research with the purpose of increasing voter turnout directly supports the structure and strength of democracy within the state.

Carol Rizzolo

Carol Rizzolo expressed enthusiastic support for SB 395 and posed many questions such as "why do so few people in CT vote? How do we think about the lack of civic engagement in so many of our friends and neighbors? She stated that she is looking forward to the findings of a dedicated task force that would give information on Connecticut's specific issues and circumstances rather than assuming that other communities and countries solutions would work well in the context of this state.

Andrew Puzio

Andrew Puzio is a student at the University of Connecticut and has stated that according to Pew Research Center 37% of non- voters find voting an inconvenient process. He states as a student he often agrees with this opinion as he has to juggle a hectic schedule including managing course work, employment, and classes. Mr. Puzio states that even as an individual who is passionate about politics it can be difficult to access voting. He notes that without access to an absentee ballot as a student he would not have been able to vote in the 2024 election.

Shiela Wade

Shiela Wade states that 90 million eligible voters did not vote in 2024, continuing a growing trend of erosion in trust and participation in government and legislative processes. Ms. Wade states that she is concerned that the involvement of private investment and donors in politics is replacing the voice of the people as special interest groups out compete grassroots campaigns.

Carol Williams

Carol Williams is a resident of Willimantic and a former Dean of Eastern Connecticut State University. She states her support for SB 395 as it will help ensure that the residents of Connecticut retain the right to vote free and fair elections.

Allison Corriea

Allison Corriea supports SB 395 for making voting easily accessible to all.

Marian Hall

Marian Hall states that as a Senior at the University of Connecticut she has had the opportunity to work as an election official and during this time she noticed that there was a lack in education around early voting as an option for students. She noted that out of the 15 day early voting period the only three or four voters would come to the polls per day. She claims that the high cost to running and staffing an early voting election can seem like a waste of resources to towns or municipalities. Ms. Hall argues that expanding accessibility to elections must be paired with intentional efforts to educate and encourage voters to participate.

Karla Jackson

Karla Jackson is a long-time resident of Connecticut and stated that she believes regardless of ideology all eligible citizens should vote in every election but very few do. She also states that Connecticut should understand what states like Minnesota, Maine, and Colorado are doing to achieve a high voter turnout.

Evelyn Mantilla 100% Democracy

Evelyn Mantilla supports SB 395 and states that in places like Hartford the low rate of voter participation places a heavy burden on an already underrepresented community. She argues that this reality is especially visible in municipal elections, where the decisions affecting schools, housing, public safety, transportation, neighborhood investment, and economic opportunity are deeply consequential for the Black and Latino residents, young people, working families, immigrants, and other communities that who face barriers to political power. She argues that these are some of the least represented in the electorate whose lives are profoundly shaped by public policy. Ms. Mantilla stresses that progress such as the expanded mail-in voting and early voting are important achievements to celebrate but there is more work to be done as some elections within the state have reached as low as 10 to 15%.

Audrey Nichols 100% Democracy

Audrey Nichols is a Junior at the University of Connecticut and a resident of Newtown Connecticut. She states that between balancing classes, coursework, various internships, a job, and two leadership positions in extracurriculars, it is very difficult to make time to vote. Ms. Nichols argues that whether a student chooses to vote in their hometown or their college campus, they often have to choose between requesting absentee ballots or commuting home which is not often feasible. She continues to say that even with the expansion to mail in voting and early voting in the state, both national and state voter participation is down. She cites various Gallup polls as indicating that in 2020, 75% of young adults lacked personal experience voting by mail, and over 1/3rd lacked "vital information" on how to go about it. Regarding the 2020 and 2024 presidential elections, Ms. Nicols cited research done by the Pew Research Center, stating that young adults grew in the "nonvoter" category, from 25% to 30%. In the same study, citizens under age 30 constituted only 15% of all voters in 2024, whereas they constituted 20% of their share of age-eligible population. In conclusion she states that this bill would also give freedom to municipalities to decide how they want to approach this issue.

Ellen Pendergast

Ellen Pendergast states that the involvement of private donors and cooperate lobbyist groups pose a great threat to our democracy and that one of the only ways to offset the negative effects of money in the political system is to increase voter participation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Christina D

Christina states that people should reserve the right to decide for themselves whether or not to vote and that this study is unnecessary.

Anonymous 86

Anonymous respondent states that they oppose SB 395 because it could create new costs and there are non-profits who work to expand education on to voting.

Reported by: Ass. Clerk Geva Tinker

Date: April 8, 2026