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of the Connecticut General Assembly

Proposed House Joint Resolution No. 5

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Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you here today. My name is Jennifer Clark, and I'm a voting rights and elections law attorney at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. The Brennan Center is a non-profit, non-partisan law and policy center, focused on the twin pillars of democracy and justice. Related to my testimony here today, the Brennan Center does research into policies that make voting more accessible while improving the integrity of our elections.

One area where we have conducted such research is early in-person voting. At least 34 states have laws enabling citizens some opportunity to vote early and in person without an excuse, and that number continues to grow.

To assess the benefits of early voting and determine a set of best practices, the Brennan Center has spoken with local election officials around the country about their state's early voting processes. We spoke with officials from urban and rural areas, from small jurisdictions and large ones, and from states with long-established early voting systems as well as from states with brand new early voting laws.

From this research, we distilled 5 benefits, as well as a set of 7 recommended best practices. As for benefits, officials repeatedly told us that early voting reduced stress on the voting system on Election Day, alleviating administrative burdens and reducing voter frustration. Election officials also frequently cited shorter lines on Election Day after the implementation of early voting. Improved poll worker and other staff performance is another advantage of early voting, as an extended voting period allows workers to gain

experience before Election Day. Relatedly, early voting also provides more opportunity to discover and correct problems with the voter rolls, the machines, or other election systems. Finally, election officials reported time and again that voters just really like early voting: voter satisfaction is shown to rise when voters are given increased flexibility and more convenience.

In order to maximize these benefits, there is a set of proven best practices, culled from those states with the most successful early voting programs. They are:

1. Begin early voting a full two weeks before Election Day.
2. Provide weekend early voting, including the last weekend before Election Day.
3. Set a consistent number of minimum daily hours for each day of early voting, and provide some hours outside of the standard business day.
4. Allow counties to use both private and public facilities.
5. Distribute early voting locations fairly and equitably to increase turnout.
6. Update poll books daily.
7. Educate the electorate about early voting.

Keeping these best practices in mind, Connecticut can put an early voting system in place that works for both election officials and voters. Academic research shows that well-implemented early voting can boost voter participation.

I am happy to discuss any of these points in further detail, and am of course happy to answer any questions Committee members might have. Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you today about early voting, and please know that the Brennan Center is here as a resource as you consider this reform. We strongly encourage the Committee to work toward bringing early in-person voting to Connecticut.