Office of Alderman Darryl J. Brackeen Jr

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NEW HAVEN ALDERMAN CRITICIZES CT SECRETARY OF THE STATE DENISE MERRILL’S OBSTRUCTION OF E-VOTING FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES, ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY PERSONNEL & VOTERS LIVING ABROAD**

*Municipalities would have been provided with the option to explore electronic voting options via accessible and secure smartphones and computers to certain populations who have historically faced unique voting obstacles, specifically voters with disabilities, voters living abroad, & active-duty military personnel.*

*“New Haven is eager and ready to explore offering an electronic voting option to our citizens who have historically faced unique challenges when casting their ballot. This proposal has bipartisan support and the language should be put back into S.B. 5. The City of New Haven  is strongly positioned to provide this option and the Secretary of the State has actively fought against making progress in this area for many years,” said New Haven Alder Darryl J. Brackeen, Jr.*

**Monday, April 5th** – The Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee in the Connecticut General Assembly struck key language from legislation, [Senate Bill No. 5](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType%253DBill%2526which_year%253D2021%2526bill_num%253D5%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137074000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw3C_55ilOZq8t3U8fLD8J3p&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137092000&usg=AOvVaw0n2GcOBd8rJB3vxX6Pbus1), after hearing testimony from Secretary of State Denise Merrill stating, “I will remain in opposition to concepts like this one”. The electronic voting proposal, contained in section 27 of the bill, has bipartisan support and would have provided municipalities with the option to explore offering a new, accessible and secure electronic voting option to certain individuals who have faced unique obstacles and long standing challenges when casting their ballots via the traditional means of in-person voting and absentee ballot mail voting.

Electronic voting, also known as “e-voting,” is “...a uniquely accessible and secure voting option whereby citizens can safely cast their ballots via smartphone, tablet, or computer. We want to ensure all individuals are able to exercise their right to vote, including those facing unique challenges and hardships in casting their ballots, such as citizens with disabilities, citizens living abroad, and active-duty military personnel and their families,” said **New Haven Alder Darryl J. Brackeen, Jr.**who has championed this effort in Connecticut. “Respectfully, we are asking the Connecticut General Assembly to at least provide the opportunity to build battle-tested infrastructure in local municipalities, we can't say something doesnt work when there has been resistance to even trying”. (Brackeen, Jr.’s full written testimony before the GAE Committee can be read [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/gaedata/tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Brackeen,%252520Darryl,%252520Chair-GenerationChangeCT-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137075000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw1THYZJoLih81ax1lXaA8P6&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137093000&usg=AOvVaw1L5YgQYAQgTvPPYbMWPYH3).)

The proposal is supported by many of New Haven’s elected leaders, including: Senate President Martin Looney, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker, New Haven City Clerk Michael Smart, and the leadership of the New Haven Board of Alders (President Tyisha Walker-Myers, Pro Tempore Jeanette Morrison, Third Officer Salvatore Decola, Majority Leader Richard Furlow). Like Brackeen, Jr., all submitted testimony in support for the electronic voting option, which is included in [Section 27 of S.B. No. 5](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType%253DBill%2526bill_num%253DSB00005%2526which_year%253D2021%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137075000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw25hH2eILrHPt7-eiWIxbdA&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137093000&usg=AOvVaw19iJ_ZObX-2AEWwsVbUpE8). The larger bill also contains other voting reform measures, such as Automatic Voter Registration, and is officially titled “An Act Concerning Increased Opportunities for Absentee Voting, Safe and Secure In-Person Voting, and Voter Registration.”

Electronic voting has been successfully and securely offered to various populations across several other diverse jurisdictions, such as: Denver, Colorado; Utah County, Utah; King County, Washington; and the state of West Virginia, among others. Brackeen and other advocates argue that Connecticut would be well-served by being able to offer a similar electronic voting option to specific populations of voters as well.

**Maryanne Melley, president of the National Federation of the Blind in Connecticut**, provided oral testimony at the GAE Committee’s recent public hearing on the bill on March 26th, sharing how in-person voting and absentee ballot mail voting have both fallen short of providing accessible, secure and private voting for the blind voters and left many disenfranchised, and that an electronic voting option stands to be a promising solution to these challenges. (Melley’s full testimony can be viewed [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v%253DpIoz5uM9qfw%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137076000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw26cEiGKynlzrteQMmJCaTc&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137093000&usg=AOvVaw3danZSrVHaNLXZowJfEwr7) at approximately the 3 hour and 29 minute mark.)

By [one estimate from the organization Democracy Live](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://mobilevoting.org/2020/04/west-virginia-expands-online-voting-option-in-upcoming-primary-election-for-citizens-with-disabilities/%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137077000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw1Z0uYhqSEiooIajRURdag9&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137093000&usg=AOvVaw0FbGy7X5VGjzg5xrbAWNbJ), “nearly 15 percent of the voting population cannot see, hold, or mark a paper ballot independently” for which an electronic voting could be a helpful option to help ensure people are able to exercise their right to vote.

According the New Haven City Clerk’s office, in the city of New Haven in the most recent 2020 general election, there were 446 citizens living outside of the United States whole voted absentee, 20 active-duty military service members who voted absentee, and 60 citizens who live in New Haven and have “permanent absentee ballot” status who voted absentee (many of whom are voters with disabilities). There was also an option on the absentee ballot application whereby voters could select ["my physical disability"](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.newhavenct.gov/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid%253D37771%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137077000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw1oPPORbSVpl1qwNxR2en9J&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137094000&usg=AOvVaw0NlDLu60FQeZ2poVpYYr1U) as a reason to request an absentee ballot, but the tally of those voters in the 2020 general election is unknown. Under this legislation, all of these voters could have availed themselves of an electronic voting option, if it had been available and provided by the municipality during the 2020 election.

Other elections and cybersecurity experts also provided testimony to the GAE Committee, including**Forrest Senti, Vice President of Programs and Operations for the National Cybersecurity Center**, who noted, “In each of the pilots that we have had the opportunity to participate in, we have witnessed how electronic ballot return has supported the key pillars of effective election administration accessibility, security, and accountability. The technologies developing to enhance electronic ballot return methods beyond email and fax have made voting easier for individuals experiencing a barrier to voting (whether because of their status as an overseas voter, or a disability); the security protocols developed are being done so in the path of the federal standards currently established for ballot marking devices and other electronic ballot return methods; and the accountability available because of the technologies allows voters the ability to anonymously check that the ballot submitted matches the paper ballot that is printed and tabulated by the respective administrative entity. (Senti’s full written testimony can be read [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/gaedata/tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Senti,%252520Forrest,%252520VP%252520of%252520Programs%252520and%252520Operations-National%252520Cybersecurity%252520Center-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137078000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw082Pu9L1HjnKqRGXxiJ-d0&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137094000&usg=AOvVaw3qSMWXT--FmDJmQA505SQH).)

Brackeen has also been able to secure the promise of philanthropic dollars to underwrite a pilot for the city of New Haven, so that standing up the program comes at no or minimal cost to taxpayers.

If the proposal is passed and signed into law, New Haven is poised to potentially become the first municipality in Connecticut to offer an electronic voting option via smartphone, tablet or computer to some of its citizens, specifically voters with disabilities, voters living abroad, & active-duty military personnel.

**ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THIS PROPOSAL (S.B. 5, SECTION 27):**

**New Haven Alder Darryl J. Brackeen, Jr.**

“As the individual who has spearheaded the effort of providing an electronic voting option in New Haven, I am here to tell you that New Haven is eager and ready to offer an electronic voting option for these individuals; and with timely passage of this legislation, New Haven is strongly positioned to provide this option in our upcoming municipal elections in November 2021. The electronic voting system has been battle-tested and has been successfully adopted and implemented in several cities, counties, and states across the country. Voters in Connecticut would be well-served by having a similar electronic voting option as well.” (Full testimony [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/gaedata/tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Brackeen,%252520Darryl,%252520Chair-GenerationChangeCT-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137079000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw2FaCbk21MADq0NfDnlkpls&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137094000&usg=AOvVaw1MOC0jn-sOR8S6Yj6ClOTk).)

**New Haven City Clerk Michael Smart**

“The bill will be connected to the current absentee ballot laws in the state. Our goal is to give every voter every opportunity and available options to exercise their right to vote.” (Full testimony [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/GAEdata/Tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Smart,%252520Michael,%252520City%252520Town%252520Clerk-New%252520Haven-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137080000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw3N8SuI3yuvN0CA7tkXMIjJ&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137094000&usg=AOvVaw02kA4j2rFa-wBStenSxUvY).)

**New Haven Board of Alders Leadership (President Tyisha Walker-Myers, Pro Tempore Jeanette Morrison, Third Officer Salvatore Decola, Majority Leader Richard Furlow)**

“We would like to initiate a similar pilot program in Connecticut – for active-duty military and citizens abroad, and for individuals with disabilities here at home. To accomplish this, we are asking that the Government Administration & Election Committee support New Haven and other municipalities with the option to implement an electronic voting program, beginning with municipal elections in 2021.

With timely passage by the Connecticut General Assembly, New Haven is positioned to move forward and offer an electronic voting option for the city’s upcoming 2021 elections, thanks to efforts that have been spearheaded and funding that has been secured by New Haven Alder Darryl Brackeen, Jr and New Haven City Town Clerk Michael Smart. This effort also has the support of Mayor Justin Elicker.” (Full testimony [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/GAEdata/Tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-City%252520of%252520New%252520Haven%252520Board%252520of%252520Alders-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137081000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw3pUUNpRMZ2STmCFQWa_U0d&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137095000&usg=AOvVaw10lJNVC--Eze-NPH-8HyB2).)

**New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker**

“The bill makes voting easier for everyone, but particularly those who face clear barriers to voting today. People living with disabilities, those who struggle to fit voting into their work schedule, or citizens who are temporarily overseas.

As Mayor, I want all of my citizens to be able to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Ultimately, this bill puts on display what we all value: the ability for the government to change and adapt. Along with expanding voter rights, this bill reinforces the idea that the citizens can use their power at the ballot box to express their opinions and make their voices heard. By making voting easier, we’re ensuring that there is proper electoral accountability for government officials. For those who want to preserve their power, it is easy to make up excuses to limit voting, but for those who fundamentally believe in fairness, the choice to support SB 5 is clear.” (Full testimony [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/GAEdata/Tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Elicker,%252520Justin,%252520Mayor-City%252520of%252520New%252520Haven,%252520Connecticut-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137081000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw0sXG-k6m9ZAC6f6moLPgVl&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137095000&usg=AOvVaw15wKwJoC275vsurdfH0wvS).)

**Senate Democrats, Connecticut General Assembly (Sen. Looney, Sen. Duff, Sen. Anwar, Sen. Haskell, Sen. Moore, Sen. Needleman, Sen. Slap, Sen Lesser, Sen. Miler, Sen. Kasser, Sen. Abrams, Sen. Cohen, Sen. Kushner**

“All voters have a right to easily and safely participate in democracy… SB5 will only serve to benefit our constituents by expanding the ability to register to vote, increasing access to absentee ballots, and providing safe and convenient methods by which supporting this important piece of legislation while it moves through the committee process and toward passage by both chambers.” (Full testimony [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/gaedata/tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Senate%252520Democrats-Connecticut%252520General%252520Assembly-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137082000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw1EL5m3VoIx1fLIGwwiRh_r&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137095000&usg=AOvVaw1yfk3v-uqpJ4RKN8WJTwtq).)

**AARP Connecticut (John Erlingheusert, Advocacy and Community Outreach Director):**

“AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization that advocates for individuals age 50 and older. We have a membership of 38 million nationwide and approximately 600,000 in CT. We advocate at the state and federal level for the issues that matter most to older adults and their families.

AARP supports the following sections...

Section 27 allows any municipality to provide a system, approved by the Secretary of State, for the electronic return of an absentee ballot by any elector.” (Full testimony [here](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/gaedata/tmy/2021SB-00005-R000326-Erlingheuser,%252520John,%252520Advocacy%252520Community%252520Outreach%252520Director-ARRP%252520Connecticut-TMY.PDF%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;source%3Deditors%26amp;ust%3D1617995137083000%26amp;usg%3DAOvVaw13IgCMPRnrrBuWcDBK5yxl&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1617995137096000&usg=AOvVaw3IKjchPt3tuKLace9Gd0BW).)

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