Period For Early Voting In Person Act

BACKGROUND

Elections should represent a shared decision by the voters made at a specific point in time based on access to the same information. For most of American history, voting took place on an established "Election Day" but today most states offer voters opportunities to vote early. Early voting offers convenience, but too many states have unreasonably excessive early voting periods that now stretch for 40 days or more. Worse still, some do not standardize early voting opportunities throughout a state. This results in unequal access to the polls that favors urban areas at the expense of rural communities, in addition to strains placed on taxpayers and election officials to pay for and manage "election season."

This model legislation balances the convenience of early in-person voting with the state's interests in fiscal responsibility and election integrity. It establishes a uniform statewide period of up to seven consecutive calendar days of early in-person voting, with standardized hours and clear notice requirements. A reasonable, standardized early voting window better ensures the outcome represents the collective will of the voters, promotes public confidence in the electoral process, and reduces burdens to election officials and taxpayers.

Elections are resource-intensive endeavors, and the financial cost of expanding early voting is significant. The Baltimore City Board of Elections went $1.4 million over budget during the 2024 election cycle. According to city finance officials, this was largely due to an additional early voting center that saw abysmal turnout. When Connecticut was considering legislation to implement early in-person voting, the Office of Fiscal Analysis produced cost estimates ranging from approximately $7-9 million for 10- to 14-day early voting windows.

The non-financial costs associated with extended early voting are equally substantial. Administering an election over several weeks burdens already strained election officials and systems. Staffing multiple voting locations for longer periods requires more poll workers, more security, and longer facility rentals. Extended windows also increase how long ballots and voting equipment must be securely stored and tracked, creating more opportunities for procedural lapses.

KEY PROVISIONS

- Establishes a uniform early in-person voting period of up to seven consecutive calendar days, ending the Friday before Election Day, and including Saturdays and Sundays but excluding legal holidays.
- Requires adjustment of the early voting period if it captures a legal holiday so voters still get the full seven calendar days of early voting.
- Sets uniform daily hours for early voting and requires that any voters in line at the time the polls close shall be permitted to cast a ballot.
- Requires the responsible election official to post public notice of the dates, hours, and location(s) at which early in-person voting will be conducted.