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FAITH LEADERS URGE ACTION ON EARLY VOTING

HARTFORD: In a letter to the General Assembly, faith leaders called on lawmakers to act on a resolution for early voting.

The missive states: “While our congregations are non-partisan, we urge our members to be good citizens as well as active participants in our democracy. Many of our members work long hours or have family obligations and other commitments that prevent them from being able to wait in long lines on Election Day. We fear that these responsibilities could be an obstacle to voting. Early voting would remove this potential barrier.”

The letter continues: “In addition, our institutions are precisely where people gather to discuss the issues that affect their lives and to translate their values into policies. In many instances, houses of worship have served as facilitators for this kind of engagement. For example, in the 37 states, and the District of Columbia, that offer early voting, souls-to-the-polls and other turnout activities are popular activities for churches, synagogues, mosques and other faith-based organizations.”

The letter is signed by more than 50 faith leaders in Connecticut.

The resolution in support of early voting, HJ 95, passed the Government Administration and Elections committee in March and passed the House earlier this month. It is now before the state Senate.

Secretary Merrill said, “Whether we are talking about people of faith, commuters or simply busy working families with important commitments, early voting would make casting a ballot easier and more convenient. Also, it would potentially relieve long lines on Election Day. Early voting

provides so many benefits to the voters of Connecticut and I am grateful to the faith community for their support of the proposal.”

When the issue came before the Government Administration and Elections Committee, early voting received supportive testimony from Common Cause Connecticut, the Brennan Center for Justice, Rock the Vote, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, the Hispanic Federation and the League of Women Voters of Connecticut.

HJ 95 is the first step in the process to make early voting available in Connecticut. An early voting bill cannot be introduced in Connecticut until restrictive language in the constitution is amended. The proposed constitutional amendment would allow for up to five days of early voting within two weeks of Election Day. If the resolution passes with a simple majority in each chamber, then it will have to be reintroduced after the next General Assembly convenes (2019) and passed again in each chamber. After passage of the second consecutive General Assembly it would then be placed on the 2020 ballot for voters to approve.