

“Social justice should be the underlying goal of all humanity.”

-Alan V. Lowenstein, Institute Founder



Testimony of Nuzhat Chowdhury  
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice  
In Support of S3990  
New Jersey State Senate Judiciary Committee  
Thursday, February 20, 2025

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Chairman Stack, Vice-Chair Singleton and members of the State Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Nuzhat Chowdhury and I am the Director of the Democracy and Justice Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (the “Institute”). The Institute uses cutting-edge racial and social justice legal advocacy to empower people of color by building reparative systems that create wealth, transform justice and harness democratic power—from the ground up—in New Jersey. This includes dismantling barriers to voting and advocating for reforms that make voting more accessible.

The Institute submits this testimony in support of S3990, which will extend the early voting period for all primary elections in New Jersey.

In our 2020 report, *Our Vote, Our Power: Lifting Up Democracy’s Voices in the Garden State*, we urged New Jersey to pass early voting options for voters in the state.<sup>1</sup> Expanding early voting is an important step in making elections more accessible. Research shows that early voting improves the voter experience—reducing long lines on Election Day, increasing voter satisfaction and providing more flexibility for those with work, school or family obligations.<sup>2</sup> It also helps election officials by improving poll worker performance, allowing early troubleshooting of issues with ballots or voter rolls and easing the strain on Election Day.<sup>3</sup>

Early voting is particularly valuable for Black voters. “Souls to the Polls,” a tradition where Black voters cast their ballots after Sunday church services, is a key part of civic engagement.<sup>4</sup> Extending early voting and allowing voters to be able to vote on more weekends ensures that more people can participate in this tradition and have their voices heard.

Excitingly, we worked with this Legislature to pass early voting in 2021. The results have spoken for themselves—while it took some time for voters to become used to this new voting option, New Jersey voters turned out for early voting in record numbers during the November 2024 elections. During

the first two days of early voting in October, over 247,000 people went to vote early, a marked increase from the number of early votes cast in previous years.<sup>5</sup> By Election Day, the Division of Elections reported that over 1.17 million New Jersey voters had chosen to vote early in-person.<sup>6</sup> There is no reason to believe this trend will not continue, especially if the early voting period is extended.

Under S3990, early voting for primary elections would begin 11 days before Election Day, creating a 10-day early voting period, compared to the current 5-day period for a presidential primary and 3-day period for a non-presidential primary. We strongly support extending the early voting period for primary elections.

However, currently, early voting for the general election lasts nine days, beginning 10 days before Election Day. To make the voting process clearer and avoid confusion, we recommend that early voting periods for all elections—primary and general—should be consistent.

New Jersey has made progress in strengthening democracy—implementing early voting during the pandemic, automatic and online voter registration, restoring voting rights to people on parole and probation, expanding vote-by-mail, and passing the Ballot Cure Act. Extending early voting for primaries builds on this progress. Accordingly, we support the passage of S3990, although we strongly urge the Legislature to align early voting days across all elections to ensure consistency and clarity for voters.

Thank you for your time and commitment to voting accessibility in New Jersey.

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<sup>1</sup> RYAN P. HAYGOOD ET AL., N.J. INST. FOR SOC. JUSTICE, OUR VOTE, OUR POWER: LIFTING UP DEMOCRACY'S VOICES IN THE GARDEN STATE 10 (2020), [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/njisj/pages/1455/attachments/original/1580744995/Our\\_Vote\\_\\_Our\\_Power\\_Report\\_for\\_Web.pdf?1580744995](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/njisj/pages/1455/attachments/original/1580744995/Our_Vote__Our_Power_Report_for_Web.pdf?1580744995).

<sup>2</sup> DIANA KASDAN, EARLY VOTING: WHAT WORKS, BRENNAN CTR. FOR JUSTICE 5-8 (2013), [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotingReport\\_Web.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotingReport_Web.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Ruby J. Garrett, *A Call for Prophylactic Measures to Save "Souls to the Polls": Importing A Retrogression Analysis in S 2 of the Voting Rights Act*, 2015 U. Chi. Legal F. 633, 634 (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Rotuno-Johnson, *NJ Turns Out in Record Numbers to Vote Early: See The Numbers*, Patch.com, Oct. 28, 2024, <https://patch.com/new-jersey/across-nj/onj-turns-out-record-numbers-vote-early-see-numbers>.

<sup>6</sup> Michelle Rotuno-Johnson, *1.9M Ballots Already Cast in NJ: See the Latest Data*, Patch.com, Nov. 4, 2024, <https://patch.com/new-jersey/across-nj/early-2024-election-voting-ends-nj-see-vote-tallies>.