

# Government Administration and Elections Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-7241

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING FOR ALL.

**Vote Date:** 3/26/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/24/2025

**File No.:**

**Disclaimer:** *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

There has been a growing demand to increase voting accessibilities in elections. In the 2024 election, Connecticut residents voted in a 58% majority to approve the legislature to remove restriction for obtaining an absentee ballot. This bill seeks to address these concerns by opening access to absentee ballots. This bill would seek to address some longstanding barriers to voting access by allowing another accessible and equitable method to participate in our elections. This would be an attempt to improve voter turnout and civic engagement across the state.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

#### **Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of the State, Office of the Secretary of the State**

While Secretary Thomas supports the intent of the bill, she notes several concerns she has with it. Generally, she wants the implementation of the absentee ballot program to be pushed back to 2026 so that more time can be taken to create a more secure and accessible program. She notes the improvements to election equipment and infrastructure are being released for 2026 and says the would-be implementor of no-excuse absentee voting would not have the bandwidth to create and implement more new processes. She also argues that Connecticut does not have substantive absentee ballot tracking systems and does not have a curing process for absentee ballots, which could cause distrust among voters. She also raises concerns regarding the increase of absentee ballot application circulators, the postal service, and lack of information on combining early voting with an expansive absentee ballot system. She cites logistical and implementation issues with more new processes that can cause confusion among voters and ballots to be rejected. The biggest issue, she highlights, is

the education of the universal absentee ballot process before its launch, which can lead to rejection rates.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Jacquelyn Eaton**

Ms. Eaton supports the bill and its aim to expand access to voting and securing people's right to vote. She notes that people have a variety of reasons why they would need an absentee ballot.

### **John Erlingheuser, Senior Advocacy and Outreach Director, AARP Connecticut**

Mr. Erlingheuser supports the bill, emphasizing that the recent election has highlighted the flaws and practices in place that are making it more difficult for citizens to vote, such as long lines, inadequate facilities and equipment, and language barriers. He believes Connecticut should implement all laws that widen the range of voting options, and notes that 58% of voters approved removing restrictions for the use of absentee ballots. He identifies public opinion surveys that show older and younger voters support the provisions of the bill. He states we should follow the lead of other states who have no excuse absentee voting.

### **Gus Hamilton, Campaign Manager, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut**

Mr. Hamilton supports the bill, highlighting the importance of voting and expanding option to vote, which makes it easier for more people's voices to be heard. He notes that people want safe, secure, and accessible venues to vote. He supports the bill but believes it can go further. First, he believes absentee voting ballots application should be mailed automatically to all eligible voters, which will eliminate inequities for underrepresented voters. He also suggests a state-wide voter education campaign about the information gaps that spur voter disenfranchisement. Third, he feels that secure ballot drop boxes should be in every town, noting, the varied access to drop boxes across the state and that boxes will reduce geographic disparities.

### **Callie Heilmann, Co-Director, Bridgeport Generation Now**

Ms. Heilmann provided comments on the bill and suggested an amendment be made to it to remove what she calls partisan operatives from the absentee process. She directly addresses the situation in Bridgeport, saying that the people who recruited the violators did not inform them of the laws and what happened was voter exploitation. She emphasizes that there is a burden on voters to report election crimes under our current system. She calls for a public education sponsored by the Secretary of State that is non-partisan that discusses the benefits of early voting.

### **Hailey Messier, Student, University of Connecticut**

Ms. Messier supports the bill, beginning with a real-life scenario about a single parent who has a packed schedule and cannot find childcare to take time from work to vote to highlight the importance of increasing access to the vote. She notes that 36 states have no-excuse absentee ballot voting, and says it worked because it allowed people who had health

concerns, childcare needs, and hectic work schedules to vote and not require people to pick one priority over another to make their voices heard.

**Mendi Paca, President & CEO, Fairfield County's Community Foundation**

Ms. Paca supports the bill, highlighting the industry's investment in civic engagement and Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns in Fairfield County. She believes the bill aligns with these goals and investments. She notes that 5 states held elections entirely by mail, with 29 states and D.C. offering no excuse absentee voting to all voters before the pandemic. She supports the bill but believes it can be strengthened to automatically mail absentee ballot applications to all eligible voters. She also thinks implementing a state-wide education campaign on absentee voting and guaranteeing secure ballot drop boxes in every town, will help make voting convenient and accessible for all.

**Ann Reed, Vice President for Advocacy, League of Women Voters of Connecticut**

Ms. Reed supports the bill, highlighting the ballot referendum in 2024 where 58% of voters approved removing restriction that limited the use of absentee ballot. She argues that there has been an increase of popularity of absentee voting with no excuses and she believes it will improve voter participation for CT, improving its status among other nations.

**Coralys Santana, Campaign Manager, The Connecticut Project Action Fund**

Ms. Santana supports the bill, emphasizing her belief that any responsible voter who wants to vote should be able to, even if they can't make it to their polling place on election day. She believes the bill will modernize materials and instructions which will reduce confusion among voters. She notes that Connecticut's absentee voting law is one of the most restrictive and that this bill will align with a majority of states that allow for voting despite other obligations. She acknowledges that this bill is not changing a process for applying, issuing, or the counting of ballots, but that it just makes it more accessible. She believes that all voting methods should be available and accessible to all and should align with everyone's life and circumstances.

**Patty Spruance, President, CT Town Clerks Association**

Ms. Spruance supports the bill, noting that Connecticut approved the allowance of each voter to vote by absentee ballot and that the CTCA supports removing the reasons but requiring an application to be completed. The group does request the implementation date to be January 1, 2026 because town clerks have already received materials for the 2025 elections.

**Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut**

Ms. Zaccagnino supports the bill. She notes the referendum in 2024 showed a majority of voters supporting expanded access to absentee voting. It also broadly emphasized the importance of voting in the country, and that safeguarding the right to vote "is a fundamental matter." She acknowledges the history of racial discrimination in voting in Connecticut, and that although progress has been made, there remain discriminatory barriers to voting. This is especially apparent with the language barrier and unfairly drawn districts. She also acknowledges rollback to the Voting Rights Act at the federal level. She argues that there

was a lot of struggles in the 2020 election to ensure people had numerous options to vote, and no-excuse absentee voting became a huge success. She cites that 35% of voters utilized absentee voting with limited administrative failures. She notes that those with little job flexibility, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, disabilities, no identification, and little language access are disproportionately voters of color, and this bill helps to eliminate those restriction by expanding access. She believes three amendments should be made to the bill. The first is automatic mailing of absentee ballot to all eligible voters, which will eliminate disproportionate inequities against voters of color, those with disabilities, and low-income voters. The second is a comprehensive education campaigns to educate the public on the absentee voting process to help reduce confusion and close the information gap to reduce voter disenfranchisement. The third is a requirement that absentee ballot drop boxes are available in every town, reducing geographic disparities, increasing convenience, and providing voters a safe and accessible option to vote.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

### **Beverly Allen**

Ms. Allen opposes the bill.

### **Susan Bradford**

Ms. Bradford opposes the bill, arguing that she will not support absentee voting by mail without proper safeguards. She lists signature verification, photo-ID requirements, discounting ballot drop boxes, the prohibition of mailed or delivered unsolicited absentee ballot application, and a verification process that voters reside at the address listed on the application and ballot as safeguards.

### **Harland Christofferson**

Mr. Christofferson is opposed to the bill, highlighting the recent events in Bridgeport as examples of vulnerabilities with absentee ballots. These practices included possessing multiple absentee ballots illegally and misrepresenting voter eligibility requirements. He has concerns with expanding the access for absentee ballots given the reasons they are typically used and argues that in-person voting is the most secure voting method. While he acknowledges that fraud has been prosecuted and legislation has been introduced to speed up investigation into election fraud, he argues the real goal needs to be preventing fraud from occurring in the first place.

### **Jerry Cincotta**

Mr. Cincotta opposes the bill, questioning the intent of the bill to remove restriction on eligibility for absentee voting as a method of securing the integrity of election. He feels signature verification, photo-ID, elimination of ballot drop boxes, and prohibiting the mailing or delivery of unsolicited absentee ballot application will make the process better. He cities Bridgeport as a means for more safeguards.

### **Lisa Cocco**

Ms. Cocco opposes the bill. She felt comfortable in the 2020 election when someone asked for an ID for her to vote and believes that every eligible voter should have their identity, citizenship, and place of residence verified. She acknowledges problems with our current system and that she was found to be registered twice and got it corrected. She believes a proper, verified ID should accompany an absentee ballot and doesn't believe everyone should be given access to vote by absentee ballot, citing concerns of fraud.

### **Christina D**

Ms. D. opposes the bill, citing concerns that this system would lead to more fraud. She believes ID requirements are best and believes more security measures should be added, such as ID and verification for voting.

### **Linda Dalessio**

Ms. Dalessio opposes the bill, citing concerns of the integrity of voter rolls and their ability to collect and contain accurate voters. She notes the error rate per federal law being 12 errors for Connecticut per the Help America Vote Act (AVA), but that the voter rolls show 240,000 errors.

### **Josiah Fleet**

Mr. Fleet is opposed to the bill, citing broad opposition.

### **James Gagne**

Mr. Gagne is opposed to the bill, believing that absentee voting is fraud. He believes everyone should show up on election day to vote and not be able to do it from home. He believes it is a way to steal ballots with fake results.

### **Jackie Homan**

Ms. Homan is opposed to the bill, which she says lacks security measures to ensure voting integrity. She believes signature verification, photo ID, and the elimination of drop boxes are better measures that should be implemented.

### **Marcella Kurowski**

Ms. Kurowski opposes the bill because of the lack of security measures in it, such as signature verification.

### **Mike Santangelo**

Mr. Santangelo opposes the bill.

**Lee Sirotnak**

Mr. Sirotnak is opposed to the bill, emphasizing the need for voting in a republic to be secure to ensure its legitimacy. Removing restrictions he says, eliminates the integrity of the voting process and welcomes fraud and abuse. He argues that verifying the eligibility of voters, and restricting illegible voters from voting and eligible voters to vote in the community they live is vital.

**Two anonymous individuals submitted testimony in opposition to the bill.**

**Reported by: Patrick Riley**

**Date: 3/31/2025**