

## **Allow Absentee Ballot Voting During a Pandemic**

Dear Members of the Government and Administrations Election Committee,

Connecticut is one of the few states that has achieved some control over the spread of COVID-19. This hard-fought battle shouldn't be undone by forcing Connecticut voters to appear at the polls to cast their votes in the November 2020 General Election or—for that matter—in any election during a pandemic. Doing so exposes voters to the risk of spreading this highly communicable disease to others at the polls or contracting it themselves and bringing it to their home or workplace, infecting vulnerable family members or work colleagues. It increases the likelihood that the virus will be resurgent in Connecticut in the weeks immediately following the 2020 General Election—a price for voting that some could pay with their lives.

No matter how diligently our municipalities prepare their polling places to manage voter traffic, disinfect equipment, and train poll workers, the very fact that people will congregate in such numbers on a single day, across the state, poses unacceptable risks to all involved. By providing an absentee ballot option to those unable or unwilling to accept the COVID-19 risks of in-person voting, Connecticut will both protect the most vulnerable voters and reduce the risks to those who choose to vote in person.

During the upcoming special session, the Connecticut legislature must strike from Connecticut General Statutes (Chapter 145, Section 9-135) the “his or her” phrase that precedes the word “illness.” This will bring our state statute in line with the language in our state Constitution. It also will enable town clerks to accept absentee ballot applications for the special elections that inevitably will follow the 2020 General Election—and will be held before a viable vaccine to protect against COVID-19 is widely available.

Registrars of voters and town clerks across Connecticut have, for years, followed very strict rules for examining absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots to ensure they match registration records and voter signatures. Again and again, they have proved that absentee ballots do not present great risk of voter fraud. As COVID-19 may be cited on absentee ballot applications for the August 11, 2020, primaries, our municipal election officials are already preparing strict, effective procedures for handling larger than normal volumes of absentee ballots. By acting now, the legislature will empower them to do the same for 2020's General Election and enable all registered voters to fulfill their civic duty safely.

Angela Liptack  
Ridgefield, CT  
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