

July 21, 2020

Dear Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Daniel Fox, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Re: LCO No. 3576, AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING AT THE 2020 STATE ELECTION AND ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

My name is Brittney Yancy, I am a registered voter in Vernon, Connecticut. I submit this statement as a resident of Connecticut, but also a member of the following three organizations that all uphold equal voting rights: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Epsilon Omicron Omega Chapter, United State of Women Greater Hartford, and CT Black Women.

Before I get into my support for the bill, I want to raise an issue that is related and critical to this discussion. This bill, at its core, is about equity, fairness, and humanity. Voting is one of the most important acts of citizenship, and citizens should have a voice in the legislative process. This 24-hour notification, and our current process, sends a clear message that the Connecticut Legislature is okay with ignoring and dismissing certain constituents. I would ask the members of this committee to demonstrate bold leadership and be a champion for the people. You have your seats because of the people, our voices matter and need to be heard. Open up this process.

To my statement:

I am writing in support of LCO No. 3576 Absentee Voting at the 2020 State Election and Election Day. This bill addresses eligible voters' use of absentee ballots in the November 2020 General Election because of COVID-19 health concerns. We are not asking to change the Constitution. In order for Connecticut residents to fully exercise their right to vote, the House and Senate must pass new legislation that permits any eligible voter to use an absentee ballot during the COVID-19 pandemic. No one should have to choose between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote, and voting by mail is one way to ensure voters do not have to make that choice. Voting by mail, using an absentee ballot, reduces the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among voters, poll workers, and the public.

There are also numerous checks and balances in our absentee ballot process:

1. A voter must fill out and sign an application to receive an absentee ballot.
2. Once an application has been received by the Town Clerk (who oversees the Absentee Ballot process in each city or town), the application is reviewed to make sure that the applicant is indeed an active registered voter in that municipality and that voter registration data matches the application.
3. If there is any question about the application, the Town Clerk confers with the Registrars of Voters to verify the voter's information.
4. Once confirmed, the application is given a number and matched later to a returned absentee ballot.
5. Election officials have a well-tested multi-step system of maintaining the privacy and security of absentee ballots.

6. Absentee ballot drop-boxes have been used safely and securely in states around the country, and can only be accessed by the Town Clerk.

With these checks and balances, this bill will reduce voter suppression in Connecticut and will ensure that historically marginalized communities have equitable access to the ballot box. This is about saving lives and protecting our hard-fought, and won, right to vote. We must protect the elderly and vulnerable during this pandemic.

I am requesting the following:

1. **“No Excuse” Absentee Ballots:** Give voters the choice to vote via absentee ballot
2. Allow all registered voters to request absentee ballots electronically. This will reduce foot traffic in the offices of Town Clerks and allow those who have concerns about their safety to access a ballot from the safety of their own homes.
3. Make voter registration more accessible. Give all eligible voters the option to register to vote whenever they interact online with a state agency. Voter registration links should be added to all state agency websites, including but not limited to DDS, DSS, and DADS.

Ultimately this bill opens up greater access to all citizens. Please act right away to allow sufficient time to successfully enact these changes. We cannot wait to see what happens with COVID-19 and get caught flat-footed in the Fall. The same precautions that have been put into place for the August 11th primaries should be afforded to all eligible voters in the General Election in November 2020.

For these reasons and more, I support this bill and ask that my elected officials pass this voter protection bill. The urgency of this bill demands that you act with intention to protect your constituents.

Sincerely,

Brittney Yancy
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Vernon, Connecticut 06066