

July 21, 2020

Testimony in support of LCO 3576, An Act Concerning Absentee Ballots

Everywhere I go I see “I love healthcare workers. Lovely sentiment. Everywhere I go, I also see people not wearing masks and not social distancing. How to square these two? It’s easy to put up a sign in your yard, but how do we protect the lives and families of our healthcare workers? No really, how?

I worked as a Primary Care Physician Assistant for 25 years. From an Emergency Room in Lower Manhattan just as the AIDS epidemic was exploding in the US to a longer professional career in primary care pediatrics, taking care of the children and families who were and are our future decision makers.

Children who loved to play, run, ride bicycles, to be hugged and to be loved.

What healthy children and adults do quite naturally and rarely notice is how easily they breathe. How easy it is to run and play without experiencing any chest pain or joint pain. And if a child got hurt, they could be soothed by nearby adults, teachers, parents, school nurses.

When my children were young 2 of them became ill with a respiratory virus which inflamed their lungs, leaving both of them with asthma-like symptoms for the next 10 years. Daily breathing treatments just so they could run and play. As a medical practitioner I learned as much as I could about asthma and respiratory illnesses, to help my sons as well as my patients. I developed an expertise in the field , becoming the first allied health professional in the nation to become a statewide coordinator for the Pediatric Research in Office Settings, a project of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

I am well aware that only a very few legislators have spent time in Emergency Rooms in the role of a clinician desperately trying to save the life of a patient or multiple patients at once. Let me describe for you in brief the cacophony of beeps, bells, whistles, terror, and pained screams..not to mention the smells and sights and tragedy we clinicians witnessed as a part of our daily work day. Many of you have likely been in an ER as a

patient and likely heard the same complaints that many of us have heard “What are they doing that is taking so long?” or “ Why don’t they have a bed available? I’ve been on this miserable gurney for hours.” I would suggested that maybe we were sitting at the bedside of a dying patient, of a terribly wounded or ill child after an accident, or the myriad other reasons that one might come into the ER.

What we never experienced was the fear that one of us might become infected and bring it home. Why? Because we could take adequate precautions: Masks, gowns, gloves were in ample supply go home shower, change clothes and have no thought that we were bringing home a death sentence to our families

For many who have never been on the inside of the medical profession, you could have no idea of the daily stress, the life and death decisions and actions that we take everyday to ease suffering and most importantly, to live up to our oath to DO NO HARM.

So after a career of paying attention to sterile technique and avoiding the various infectious pitfalls of a 25 yr career as a clinician, how could it be that lawmakers in CT want me to go to vote during a pandemic? Putting my life at risk, and potentially exposing my 68 yr old husband, and my 98 yr old mother for whom I am the only connection to the outside world at this time.

My risk of exposure in the community from those who are maskless and asymptomatic, who claim to love healthcare workers, are the reason that my husband and I continue to fully self quarantine. The risk of exposure and illness is to great.

While there is little question that elderly are at greater risk, I want to focus on the risks to 1. pregnant women and their unborn child 2 Children

Studies have shown that the placenta is compromised when the pregnant mom is infected with Covid-19. What are the effects of this on the unborn child? We don’t know yet. What are the long term effects on the child? also unknown. But imagine our young healthy Mom who , due to Covid has been diligent about staying home with her other children. Now how does she vote? She can’t leave her children with their grandparents due to Covid and she can’t go to vote without risking exposure, illness and

potentially death in her spouse and her parents, not to mention a lifetime of illness in her children. She must vote from home.

In closing I want to speak about a 10 yr old bi-racial young man who I saw during my time in clinical pediatrics. By all appearances, he was a robust and life loving little guy. His Mom came in to ask for an excuse for any activity that involved running or physical exercise. Why I asked for his history and listened to his heart, I learned why. He had suffered from Kawasaki Disease when he was 5 yrs old, a vasculitis much like Multi-system Inflammatory Disease-Covid. If he ran or played with his friends, he would likely have a heart attack and die. He suffered with continuous joint pains and was severely restricted in his activities.

Imagine he is your child. You know that because you went to vote, you likely exposed your youngster to a life of pain and mortal threat.

Is that what you would want for your child? For your grandchild? I think not.

I love healthcare workers means more than merely a yard sign. It means that you protect me and I protect you.

We need to be able to exercise our right to vote from the safety of our own homes. How could anyone even question this?

Thank you, ‘

Carol Rizzolo, PA, PhD
24 Long Hill Farm
Guilford, CT 06437