

Special Session Listening Session - Expanding Absentee Voting
Government Administration and Elections Committee
July 21, 2020

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Haskell, Representative Winkler, Senator Sampson, Representative France and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee.

My name is Collette Bement and I am 66 years old. My husband is 80 years old and we are the parents of a 33-year old son, Scott, who has an intellectual disability. With regards to COVID-19, all three of us are in the high-risk category for catching the highly contagious and deadly virus.

Although there is still only limited knowledge about the science of the virus, what is known is that COVID-19 can be particularly severe for older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions. It can be especially critical for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who, according to a recent Syracuse University study, are four times more likely to contract COVID-19, and twice as likely to die from it. When Governor Lamont signed an Executive Order in March 2020 declaring a public health emergency in the state, it also restricted visitation to DDS-supported residences and we lost the opportunity to visit and spend time with Scott at his home or ours. That order of restricted visitation was not lifted until June 20, almost 4 months later! Can you imagine how difficult it was for us, and especially for our son, not be able to see and visit with each other? During that time, Scott's work was closed and all of his social activities were cancelled – he literally did not leave his home during the lockdown!

Life for my husband and me has also changed since COVID-19 began. We have diligently followed the directives to initially quarantine in place, and then to wear face masks/coverings and to socially distance when leaving home. We have limited ourselves to essential shopping trips, including grocery shopping during “senior hours” from 7-8 AM or using “curbside pick-up”.

Connecticut and Tolland are doing well right now with our percentage of positive tests for COVID-19 in the state less than 1%. But what will happen in the fall when the state “opens up” and people return to work and school? If there is a “second wave” of COVID-19 in the fall, we could very easily be placed back into quarantine. At this point, absolutely no one can predict what will happen. But what is known at this point, is that in-person voting carries a greater risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 than voting via absentee ballot. The right to vote is fundamental to a free and democratic society and no person should be required to risk their health in order to vote, in particular the elderly, the sick or persons with I/DD, and no person should be denied the right to vote because they fear going to the polls and contracting COVID-19.

I am asking the Legislature to expand access to absentee ballots to all people with disabilities and all Connecticut voters for the general election on November 3, 2020.

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