

Testimony of Doris A. Maldonado
Chair of Keep the Promise Coalition

Expand Access to Absentee Ballot Voting
July 21, 2020

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

My name is Doris Maldonado and I am Chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition and Statewide Bilingual Health Information Specialist for PATH P2P Family Voices CT.

I am testifying today in support of expanded access to absentee ballot voting for the general election in November, because the safest and most secure way to vote in a pandemic is to vote-by-mail. This is particularly important for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities (I/DD), who according to (my alma matter) Syracuse University's recent study, are four times more likely to contract COVID-19, and twice as likely to die from it.

Today, I come before you most importantly as a VOTING LATINA with developmental disabilities, adoptive parent of twins with developmental disabilities, a foster daughter who will be 3 in August and is immunocompromised, as an orphaned daughter of COVID-19 having lost my mother in NY on April 17, my Godmother in December and my aunt in Utah this Saturday. My 16 year old son, with autism, survived a false negative result after 16 excruciating days in March. His pediatrician was more concerned for my immunosuppressed system after informing us that he believed the test was faulty as were so many others. My sons were orphaned by 3 and in my care since they were 9 months old. Voting has been an essential educational component as they've accompanied me to the polls, have spoken at the Capitol and in Washington sharing their experiences thriving as marginalized humans with disabilities and in foster care because there should be "NADA SOBRE NOSOTROS SIN NOSOTROS. NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US" !

1. While adding a one-time COVID-19 excuse to vote absentee (ONLY) for the 2020 general election, the draft bill STILL RESTRICTS VOTING RIGHTS beyond the language of our state constitution.
 2. Current absentee ballot criteria do not allow for a person with any disability, other than a physical disability to vote via absentee ballot. This leaves people with I/DD, their families, and their paid caregivers unable to obtain an absentee ballot because they are concerned about safety.
- Approximately 5,000 people with I/DD who live in DDS funded residential facilities will be forced back into lock down and will be unable to leave their homes to vote.
 - These same safety concerns hold true for approximately 45,000 people with I/DD who live alone or at home with family or other caregivers, many of whom are unsafe leaving their homes due to the increased risk for their loved ones.

That is why you must pass legislation to do the following:

1. Align state statute with the state constitution to ensure voting rights are secured.
2. "No Excuse" Absentee Ballots: Allow all voters who want to, to vote via absentee ballot. Connecticut's absentee ballot criteria does not include any provision that would allow voters to apply for an absentee ballot because they are concerned about safety during the pandemic.

3. Beyond November's election, the draft bill would allow voters to get absentee ballots because of "such elector's or person's illness". BY REMOVING these four words "such elector's or person's" from the bill, YOU will ENSURE that ALL eligible CT voters will retain the access to voting rights.
4. Allow all registered voters to request absentee ballots electronically. This will reduce 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.
5. Make voter registration easier and more accessible. Give ALL eligible voters the option to register to vote whenever they interact online with a state agency. Add voter registration links to all state agency websites!
6. There are lifesaving reasons for you to take action in securing your constituents safety and accessibility BEYOND November. 77% of voters in Connecticut, support legislation that would add the COVID PANDEMIC or other public health emergency, as a valid legal excuse to vote by absentee ballot. There are already 5 states that have universal mail in ballots and 29 states, plus the District of Columbia which allow "no excuse" absentee ballot voting. In 2016 close to ¼ of all voters in the country voted by mail and there is no evidence that voting by mail increases fraud, or that it enables an advantage to either political party. What it WILL do, is make voting safer and more accessible for everyone, but particularly for people with I/DD who are at a much higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19.

1 out of 5 people in the NATION live with "invisible disabilities". My sons and I live with over 15 disabilities between us. Future legislators should NOT have to continuously revisit for special sessions to PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS and we should not choose between SURVIVAL and our right to EQUITY! I've lost enough. Please don't let me lose my right to vote!

Gracias. Thank you for enabling our safety and voices from home- if we can do it now-we MUST do it with YOU moving forward.