

July 21, 2020

Government Administration and Elections Committee members,

The COVID pandemic has exposed many weakness and shortfalls in our government, today you will hear testimony on one, voting. Sadly, voting access in Connecticut falls far behind other states. The draft bill under consideration today does little to fix these issues and instead only offers a short-term fix that does not even address voting issues during this pandemic fully. There is no logical reason why this legislation should only offer COVID as an 'excuse' to request an absentee ballot for the November election only. What about special elections that arise after November? Or municipal primaries early next year? Another bill? Similarly, absentee ballot drop boxes should be extended after 2020. These are more convenient to voters, these should be permanently implemented, but certainly, at minimum, through the duration of the pandemic. There should also be additional language added to require these drop boxes to be located outside of a municipal building. The purpose of voting by absentee ballot and the drop box is to eliminate the need for voters to enter buildings unnecessarily. Municipalities that place their drop boxes inside buildings are putting voters at unnecessary risk and limits hours of access—both unacceptable.

The broader concern that should be the focus of this legislation is that voting needs a complete overhaul in Connecticut. The immediate task at hand should be to implement no-excuse absentee ballots permanently. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia all offer absentee ballots without an excuse needed; five states vote solely by mail. Voter fraud and absentee ballot fraud is not a valid concern. Do we believe that all these states have been conducting invalid elections? Of course not. This is not a partisan issue. Greater voting access does not benefit one party over another. It should be the goal of this body to encourage the highest level of participation in each election as possible. No-excuse absentee ballots is the easiest and most logical first step. We have waited far too long.

At minimum this legislation needs to address the full pandemic, which is of unknown length, not just the 2020 elections. It is irresponsible not to. There was opportunity to address larger issues of voting access in our state and this legislation misses that opportunity.

Thank you,

Jennifer Pope

Resident, Hamden, CT

11th District State Central Committeewoman

Founder, Hamden Progressive Action Network