

Written Testimony
July 21, 2020

Re: Public Act 12-57 AN ACT CONCERNING PERMANENT ABSENTEE BALLOT STATUS FOR THE PERMANENTLY DISABLED. (<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2012/ACT/Pa/pdf/2012PA-00057-R00SB-00214-PA.pdf>)

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

We are living in unprecedented times! There is currently a global pandemic of a novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) which is ravaging the world, our country, our state and our town. My family has two immunocompromised individuals, one with physical and intellectual disabilities, and we have been in quarantine since March. Although there is still only limited knowledge about the science of the virus, the most current understanding is that the virus is spread as an airborne aerosol – it is extremely contagious and is easily inhaled, in particular, when indoors. COVID-19 can be particularly severe for older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions. In addition, COVID-19 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! As you likely know, there are currently no effective vaccines or treatments available to the public for COVID-19.

Governor Lamont signed Executive Order No. 7QQ making it possible for any eligible registered Republican and Democrat to vote in their respective party's August 11, 2020 primary by "No Excuse" absentee ballot if he or she is unable to appear at his or her polling place during the hours of voting because of the illness caused by or fear of contracting COVID-19. However, this directive does not pertain to the general election on November 3, 2020.

Connecticut and Tolland are doing well right now with our percentage of positive tests for COVID-19 in the state less than 1%. As citizens, we have faithfully and respectfully followed the directives to initially quarantine in place, and then to wear face masks/coverings and to socially distance when leaving home. 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 the virus.

For that reason, we are calling on the State of Connecticut General Assembly to amend the General Statutes to specifically allow for "No Excuse" absentee ballots for November 2020.

Respectfully,
John, Susan, Nancy & Annalee Hughes
Tolland, CT