

July 20, 2020

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

To the distinguished members of the General Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Jonathan Perloe. I am one of the leaders of Voter Choice Connecticut, the volunteer citizens' group working to bring Ranked Choice Voting to Connecticut.

I am testifying in support of LCO 3576, to expand access to absentee voting for the 2020 election to all eligible voters. **Quite simply, no voter should have to decide between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote.**

This is not controversial. Recent [polling](#) by Survey USA reported that majorities of Connecticut voters, regardless of party affiliation, support expanded access to voting by absentee ballot. Despite the state's enviable position of low COVID-19 caseloads, the public health risks of the pandemic remain, and tragically are likely to become greater over the coming months because other states have not mirrored the responsible behavior of Connecticut officials and residents. Last month the CDC released [guidance](#) recommending alternatives to in-person voting.

Ensuring that every eligible individual can vote without risking their life should not be a partisan issue. It is unfortunate that the issue of voting rights is once again being treated that way.

I am concerned that the false narrative about the Governor's executive order being unconstitutional, eagerness to file lawsuits and baseless claims of absentee ballot fraud and election vulnerability are undermining public confidence in the election. This could have significant consequences.

Lack of confidence in elections is related to voter participation. Unfounded concerns about the security of voting by absentee ballot expressed by some legislative leaders could lead to greater in-person voting, with its attendant health risks, or not voting at

all. One prominent elected official went so far as to say on [NPR](#) that, “voter fraud has been a huge issue in Connecticut.”

That is simply not true. Numerous studies have concluded that voter fraud is virtually non-existent, for both [in-person](#) and [mail-in voting](#). News21, an initiative supported by the Carnegie and Knight foundations, [documented](#) just 196 cases of alleged election fraud in Connecticut over the years 2000 to 2012, during which time approximately 12 million votes were [cast](#). Alleged incidents specific to absentee ballots totaled 89. Of those, 70 were found to have merit. At just 0.0006% of votes cast, the rate of documented absentee ballot fraud is infinitesimal and indefensible as a reason to restrict access, as some have recommended.

Despite the paucity of election fraud, isolated incidents of illegal absentee ballot misconduct by political operatives in Connecticut have occurred. Illegal and unethical conduct must not be tolerated, whether by voters or third parties. The bill before you should be expanded to appoint and fund monitors in any jurisdiction where credible cases of misconduct have been reported across election cycles. Enforcing election law is important, as long as it doesn't turn into intimidation.

I commend the GAE Committee for bringing this bill forward. I also commend Secretary of State Merrill for everything her office has done to make it easier for us to exercise our right to vote, like mailing absentee ballot applications to eligible voters and paying for return postage.

The legislature should follow in her steps and do everything in its power to maximize voter participation in the 2020 elections while protecting voters from the risks of COVID-19.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

Jonathan Perloe  
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