

Latosha Johnson, Hartford, CT

To the Chairmen and Distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Latosha M. Johnson, I am a resident of the city of Hartford. I am submitting written testimony in support of LCO No. 3576 Absentee Voting at the 2020 State Election and Election Day. This bill addresses eligible voters' use of absentee ballots in the November 2020 General Election because of COVID-19 health concerns. We are not asking to change the Constitution. In order for Connecticut residents to fully exercise their right to vote, the House and Senate must pass new legislation that permits any eligible voter to use an absentee ballot during the COVID-19 pandemic. No one should have to choose between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote, and voting by mail is one way to ensure voters do not have to make that choice. Voting by mail using an Absentee Ballot reduces the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among voters, poll workers, and residents.

There are numerous checks and balances in our absentee ballot process:

1. A voter must fill out and sign an application to receive an absentee ballot.
2. Once an application has been received by the Town Clerk (who oversees the Absentee Ballot process in each city or town), the application is reviewed to make sure that the applicant is indeed an active registered voter in that municipality and that voter registration data matches the application.
3. If there is any question about the application, the Town Clerk confers with the Registrars of Voters to verify the voter's information.
4. Once confirmed, the application is given a number and matched later to a returned absentee ballot.
5. Only a verified applicant will receive an absentee ballot with return envelope mailed to the address specified by the voter. When a completed absentee ballot is received, the Town Clerk records the return date so everything can be tracked.
6. Election officials have a well-tested multi-step system of maintaining the privacy and security of absentee ballots.
7. Absentee ballot drop-boxes have been used safely and securely in states around the country, and can only be accessed by the Town Clerk.

With these checks and balances, this bill will reduce the incidences of voter suppression in Connecticut and will ensure that historically marginalized communities have equitable access to

the ballot box. This is about saving lives and protecting our hard-fought, and won, right to vote. We must protect the elderly and vulnerable during this pandemic.

I am requesting the following:

1. "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.
2. Allow all registered voters to request absentee ballots electronically.

This will reduce foot 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.

3. 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. Voter registration links should be added to all state agency websites, including but not limited to DDS, DSS, and DADS.

Ultimately this bill opens up greater access to all citizens. Please act right away to allow sufficient time to successfully enact these changes. We cannot wait to see what happens with COVID-19 and get caught flat-footed in the Fall. The same precautions that have been put into place for the August 11th Primaries should be afforded to all eligible voters in November 2020.

For these reasons and more, I support this bill and ask that my elected officials pass this voter protection bill. The urgency of this bill demands that you act with intention to protect your constituents.

Respectfully submitted,

Latosha M. Johnson (18C Franklin Avenue, Hartford)

 7/21/20