

Dear Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and members of the GAE committee:

I am writing to provide feedback on LCO 3576, An Act Concerning Absentee Voting At The 2020 State Election And Election Day Registration. For your reference, I am a Registrar of Voters in the Town of Fairfield.

I generally support the proposals in the bill, and would like to make three comments, which are below. I will thank you for your time and consideration here at the top; if you have any further questions I would be happy to answer them at your request.

Best regards,

Matthew Waggner
Registrar of Voters, Fairfield
203-256-3115
mwaggner@fairfieldct.org

1) ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

In Section 6, the bill requires that the single, required Election Day registration location feature access to the centralized voter registration system in subsection (c)(1), while offering no guidance about whether the additional locations in subsection (c)(2) require access to that system. I would suggest that you make the legislative intent on this matter clear, as the feasibility of this proposal depends on the kinds of technology and training that this expanded set of pollworkers will require.

I support the expansion of EDR to additional locations, and am eager in particular to make this service available at polling places, as a failsafe option for voters who have lapsed, recently moved, or failed to register for whatever reason. However, access to the centralized voter registration system is limited to only a single state-provided hardline network connection per municipality, and I know from recent inquiries that towns cannot have another line dropped even if they are willing to pay the cost of installation. Further, training someone to independently operate the voter registration software requires substantially more training than is practical for a single day of service, particularly in the larger towns and cities where the additional locations are most needed.

I would propose adding this language to section 6, subsection (c)(2): "If the state-wide centralized voter registration system is not available at a location provided for by this subsection, the Election Day registration officials shall admit the voter immediately upon acceptance of their application and return the voter's ballot and depository envelope to the location in subsection (c)(1) so the voter's information may be entered in the state-wide centralized voter registration system and their eligibility to vote may be determined before submitting their ballot for counting. This determination shall be made by the deadline for counting provisional ballots in 9-232n."

2) ABSENTEE BALLOT DEADLINES

One of the valid criticisms of expanded absentee voting is the higher rejection rate of absentee ballots compared to in-person voting. While many factors contribute to absentee rejections, the largest factor is the requirement that all ballots be received by – and not postmarked by – 8pm on Election Day.

Even before postal delays that have recently been in the news, it was not uncommon for mail sent from our town hall to take 7 days to reach voters in our town, or 14 days for the earliest postage-paid responses to return when we send something out to our voters.

I would suggest that you allow us to count ballots postmarked by 8pm on the day of the election to minimize the downside risk of absentee voting to our voters, and to avoid the predictable outcry when the number of late-arriving absentee ballots dwarfs the margin of victory in close races.

3) ABSENTEE BALLOT ACCESSIBILITY

One of my constituents has brought a dilemma to my attention, which is that voters who are blind are unable to vote privately by absentee ballot. He may write separately to you regarding proposed solutions, and I would urge you to consider them – the abbreviated notice for this session prevents me from securing his permission to incorporate his comments in my testimony.

I would note that you may be able to allow the state, towns, or vendors to proactively serve this community better by expanding access to federal balloting materials, in particular the federal write-in absentee ballot, to voters with disabilities in CGS Sec. 9-153a. This would allow voters who have requested a regular absentee ballot that they can't mark independently to return a federal form with their candidate selections that we would then be able to count by hand in accordance with their wishes.