

**An Act Concerning Absentee Ballot Voting at the 2020 State Election and
Election Day Registration (LCO 3576)**

**Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing
July 21, 2020**

Good afternoon Sen. Flexer, Rep. Fox, Ranking Members France and Sampson and honorable members of the GAE Committee.

My name is Michele Jacklin and I am a member of the board of Common Cause in Connecticut, a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizens lobby whose goal is open, honest and accountable government. For the past seven years, I have also served as a poll worker – as an assistant registrar and as supervisor of Election Day Registration – in my hometown of Glastonbury.

Common Cause supports legislation that would permit eligible Connecticut voters to cast absentee ballots in the 2020 general election. But it is from the perspective of a poll worker that I would like to speak to the necessity of adopting this bill. (There are some technical flaws in the proposal but I will leave it to others to highlight them.)

I was asked a few months ago by the local registrar of voters if I would work at the polls in both the Aug. 11 primary and the Nov. 3 general election. I was told that the utmost of precautions would be taken and that I would be provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to shield me from contracting covid-19.

Out of a sense of civic duty, my initial inclination was to say yes. But upon reflection, I declined. I am over the age of 65, as is the majority of poll workers in Glastonbury, which would put me in particular peril if I were to fall ill. In addition, it would be an extreme hardship to wear PPE from 5:15 a.m. – the required starting time for poll workers – until 9 or 10 p.m., when my duties would end. It would also be impossible not to touch my face for 15 hours. Others have shared with me similar concerns for their safety.

As a result, Glastonbury (with its seven polling places), as well as cities and towns across Connecticut, are facing an incredibly difficult challenge in adequately staffing polling places.

At the same time, the fear of falling ill is going to steer voters to use absentee ballots. Already, the registrar of voters in Glastonbury has reported that thousands of absentee ballot applications have been received in advance of the Aug. 11 primary, despite the fact that the primary is virtually meaningless for voters in my town.

I respectfully ask: What is going to change between Aug. 11 and Nov. 3? Nothing. In fact, medical experts say the danger of contracting covid-19 is apt to be greatly heightened in light of an expected fall surge. Compounding the dire situation will be the arrival of the seasonal flu. Lastly, vastly more people are expected to vote on Nov. 3 than in the Aug. 11 primary if for no other reason than the addition of unaffiliated voters.

If Connecticut's absentee ballot restrictions are not relaxed, it's highly probable that tens of thousands of citizens will choose safety over voting. Those who courageously – or perhaps recklessly – venture to the polls will almost certainly face long lines and poorly staffed polling places because of the reluctance of people like me who opt not to put themselves in harm's way during a pandemic.

Given the grave threat that the coronavirus poses to voters and workers alike, this legislation will go a long way in guaranteeing that Connecticut voters will be able to safely exercise their franchise in the Nov. 3 general election. I urge its passage.

Thank you.

Michele Jacklin
Glastonbury, CT 06033