



Testimony of

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Government Administration and Elections Committee  
July 21, 2020

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

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and members of Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Sal Luciano and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 220,000 members in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of LCO 3576 An Act Concerning Absentee Voting at the 2020 State Election and Election Day Registration.

The labor movement believes that ensuring and protecting the right of every citizen to vote is a bedrock principle of our democracy. However, our democracy suffers from deliberate voter suppression and disenfranchisement that enables the continued erosion of rights for working families, the attack on an economy that works for everyone, and the assault on one of our most fundamental democratic rights—the right to vote. Connecticut’s hardworking families and communities deserve full access to the ballot box. That means making voting as convenient, fair and secure as possible.

During this deadly pandemic, voting must also be safe. No voter should have to risk their health in order to exercise their constitutional right. Unfortunately, we have seen other states hold elections over the past few months that did just that. Crowded in-person polling places with long lines put the lives of seniors, those with pre-existing conditions, and countless others at risk. It also likely discouraged vulnerable voters from even attempting to cast their ballots.

We commend Governor Lamont for issuing an executive order to allow all voters to vote by absentee ballot in next month’s primary election. His action and the work of Secretary of State Denise Merrill will ensure Connecticut voters can exercise their franchise with confidence that they won’t contract COVID-19 at a polling location. It also allows essential workers, who have been keeping us safe throughout this pandemic, to cast their ballots without having to take time away from their important work.

Now, the General Assembly must act to protect voters in the November general election and beyond. LCO 3756 will allow voters to vote by absentee ballot in November, which we support, but we implore you to look ahead to the future and prepare for the worst.

Though Connecticut’s COVID-19 cases have significantly subsided, the number of cases in other states are spiking at alarming levels. Despite the best efforts of Governor Lamont and his administration, it’s likely that Connecticut will experience an increase in COVID-19 infections in the coming months. Even the scientists and health professionals have no idea how long this pandemic will last. It would be irresponsible for the General Assembly to ignore what’s happening around us and not act to protect the integrity of elections at least until COVID-19 can be brought to manageable levels.

We urge the Committee to align state statute with the state constitution to ensure voting rights are secured; ensure absentee ballot applications are sent to every eligible voter; install drop boxes in safe public locations; and continue to allow absentee voting beyond the potential development, approval process and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Currently, Connecticut General Statutes 9-135 (a) (3) allows voters to get absentee ballots because of "his or her illness." It is limiting language that, if left in place, could impact voting in elections beyond November, while COVID-19 rages on. By removing "his or her" from the statute regarding absentee ballot voting, it will ensure that as long as the pandemic remains, residents will have secure, fair and safe access to voting rights. It will also prevent the need for the General Assembly to return for another special session during a pandemic to make sure voters don't risk their lives when casting their ballots.

Three states that currently hold elections entirely by mail, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, have significantly higher voter participation during elections. Vote by mail is efficient and cost effective, and creates a verifiable paper trail. Studies have shown that voting by mail does not give an advantage to any political party, and support for vote by mail includes all demographic groups, geographic areas and political affiliation. This is one method that works to deliver a democracy that is inclusive.

We join with dozens of other civic organizations across the political spectrum in calling for real integrity in our democracy by protecting voters' rights during this pandemic. We urge the Committee to support this bill and expand it to make sure voters can cast their ballots safely as long as the coronavirus remains prevalent among us. Thank you.