



**Testimony of Shannon Jacovino**  
**Director of Advocacy & Public Policy**  
**LCO No. 3576 AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING AT THE 2020**  
**STATE ELECTION AND ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION**  
**July 21, 2020**

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Haskell, Representative Winkler, Senator Sampson, Representative France and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

My name is Shannon Jacovino and I am the Director of Advocacy & Public Policy for The Arc Connecticut.

The Arc Connecticut is the oldest and the largest community-based organization advocating for and with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. We work tirelessly to uphold our vision that every individual and family living with I/DD has access to the information, advocacy, and skills they need to support their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.

We are a chapter of The Arc of The United States, which has 675 chapters in 49 states and over 5,000 service locations. Nationwide, we have approximately 7,000 board members, 124,000 staff, 46,000 volunteers and collectively we serve more than 1 million people with I/DD and their family members.

In Connecticut, our 14 Arc local chapters deliver over \$100 million in jobs, supports and services to thousands of people in 162 communities. Together Arcs are the largest provider of supports and services for people with I/DD and their families in the state.

**Please accept my amended testimony on LCO No. 3576 AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING AT THE 2020 STATE ELECTION AND ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION which represents progress on expanding access to absentee ballot voting, but needs to be aligned with the state constitution to ensure voting rights are secured.**

This bill as written adds a one-time COVID-19 excuse to vote absentee only for the 2020 general election, but still restricts voting rights beyond the language of Connecticut's state constitution. Beyond the November general election, the draft bill would allow voters to get absentee ballots because of "such elector's or person's illness."

By simply removing the words "such elector's or person's" from all sections of the draft bill you can ensure that as long as the pandemic remains in America eligible Connecticut voters will have access to voting rights – including any possible special elections early in 2021. Legislators should not have to be called into special session to protect the voting rights of Connecticut residents.

***This is particularly important for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities (I/DD), who according to a recent Syracuse University study, are four times more likely to contract COVID-19, and twice as likely to die from it. Due to this, the many uncertainties that remain regarding this virus cause particular hardship and the need for an increased level of caution for people with I/DD, their families and their paid caregivers, who worry that about transmitting the virus to the people they care for and to their own families.***

- Will there be a second wave? Experts aren't sure, but if a second wave does occur, *it is likely that 5,000 people with I/DD who live in DDS funded residential facilities* will be forced back into lock down and will be unable to leave their homes to vote.

- These same safety concerns hold true for approximately *45,000 people with I/DD* who live alone or at home with parents or other caregivers, many of whom continues to feel unsafe leaving their homes due to the increased risk for their loved ones.
- Current absentee ballot criteria do not allow for a person with any disability, other than a physical disability to vote via absentee ballot. This leaves people with I/DD, their families, and their paid caregivers unable to obtain an absentee ballot because they are concerned about safety.

There is no good reason for you not to take action to make voting safer and more accessible in November. 77% of voters in Connecticut, support legislation that would add the coronavirus outbreak, or other public health emergency, as a valid legal excuse to vote by absentee ballot. There are already 5 states that have universal mail in ballots and 29 states, plus the District of Columbia which allow “no excuse” absentee ballot voting. In 2016 close to ¼ of all voters in the country voted by mail and there is no evidence that voting by mail increases fraud, or that gives an advantage either political party. What it does do, is make voting safer and more accessible for everyone, but particularly for people with I/DD who are at a much higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19.

**People with I/DD, their families and their paid caregivers are counting on you to get this right, and to ensure that their voting rights are protected now and throughout this pandemic.**

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