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**Testimony on LCO 3576 regarding Absentee Ballots.**

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, ranking members Senator Sampson, Representative France, and esteemed members of the GAE committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding LCO 3576: Absentee Ballots.

My name is Shannon Lane, and I am a social worker. In my role as the chair of the research committee of the Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work at the University of Connecticut, I research and disseminate information about voting rights and access. I also teach and conduct research at Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University and serve as the Deputy Registrar of Voters for Bethany Connecticut, but the views I express here are my own.

**I support the updating of the state statutes to increase access to voting rights in Connecticut, but am concerned this bill does not go far enough.**

Looking ahead to both the August 11 primary and the November 3 general election, I am concerned about the risk to registrars, poll workers, and voters. I am, frankly, concerned that working the polls on Election Day will put me and my family, including my two young children, at risk. I am also concerned for all of my poll workers and fellow registrars, the majority of whom fall into a major risk category because of age or other concern.

This bill, which is in alignment with the language in the state Constitution, would provide more access to the ballot in November for voters and lessen the number of people in polling places for that election, which I support. I would support easier access to voting by mail regardless of the pandemic, but it is especially important now.

I am concerned that this bill's one-time exemption for the November election is not enough. As written, the bill would not cover the May municipal elections in Andover, Union, Woodbridge, and my town of Bethany; the city election in Groton; the borough elections in Bantam, Danielson, Fenwick, Jewett City, Litchfield, Newtown, Stonington, or Woodmont; or any special elections to occur after November. The voters in these towns and boroughs deserve the same protection that is being offered to all of Connecticut's voters in November, and writing this bill in such a narrow form requires that the General Assembly continue to revisit this issue, when we have the opportunity now to protect them.

In Connecticut, voting by mail using an absentee ballot is overwhelmingly safe and secure, and goes through several checks with both the town clerks and registrars of voters. I have counted ballots many times at the polls and participated in the audit/recount process.

I hope that as you consider this change in statute, you will consider the health of Connecticut's voters, registrars, pollworkers, and our families, as well as the health of our democracy.

**Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.**