



State of Connecticut

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Testimony of Representative Linda Schofield
Government Administration and Elections Committee
February 14, 2011

SB 941: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING

Chairman Morin, Chairwoman Slossberg, and esteemed members of the Committee –

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 941.

I, among several others, introduced a proposed bill to do exactly what SB941 is intended to do.

In my district, Tariffville School is usually one of four polling places in my town and serves a section of town that is east of the Farmington River. Due to school construction, the poll had to be closed for the election two years ago, and voters were re-directed to the Henry James School across the river about 3 miles away, and accessible only by one bridge.

We sought to notify voters in Tariffville of this change via newspaper notices, flyers mailed to each household, flyers stuffed in each house doorway, and announcements at village fairs. Fearing that some voters in Tariffville would still not be aware of the change until Election Day, I and others went door to door spreading the word. In that process of talking to voters I encountered several for whom the extra distance, across the river and through many small streets, was enough of a barrier to stop them from voting.

A few folks said they leave early for work and return late, normally voting en route to or from their jobs. But the extra time it would take to get across the bridge and through town at the busiest time of day, when they were on a tight schedule was problematic.

They could not legally vote by absentee ballot because they could not honestly say they were not in town on election day during voting hours.

In one family the wife appeared to be somewhat disabled but she said she has good days and bad. She clearly was embarrassed and did not want to describe herself as disabled or ill and she could not predict how she would feel on Election Day, ill or well. She indicated she hoped to vote, but it all depended on how she was feeling on Election Day, and how the weather was....as her discomfort was aggravated by the cold and wet, and her risk from falling if it were snowy or icy was too great.

Several elderly folks also refused to seek an absentee ballot, though for them standing in line or being out in foul weather on Election Day would be a clear deterrent to voting. The poll where I stood had lines at least 100 people long during the Presidential election. Fortunately the weather was fair and I hope all of these people were able to get out and vote. But we all know turn-out is bad when the weather is bad.

As an elected official, although I was inclined to tell these folks to just stretch the truth a little for their own convenience, I did not feel I could counsel them to break the letter of the law. Furthermore, their pride and honesty clearly would have prevented them from stretching the truth.

For these reasons, I believe we should make absentee voting an option available for anyone who wants to vote that way – either as a matter of convenience, personal preference or any other reason. That would remove the stigma and fear of violating the law that now accompany having to say you are disabled or away, when you might not be.

As others will testify, many other states enable – indeed encourage – absentee voting. It is not only convenient for the voters, but also reduces congestion at the polls. Some states have indicated they reduced costs by moving to “no excuse” absentee voting.

I also think this is a better alternative than “early voting”, since it preserves the sense among most people that Election Day carries some urgency to vote. Indeed, early voting has – according to recent reports, not increased voter turnouts.

Thank you.

Linda Schofield
State Representative, 16th District