

197-22

H.B. 6113 – Oppose: Would decrease turnout, disenfranchise, and increase risks

Government Administration and Elections Committee
Testimony – February 25, 2015

Luther Weeks
Luther@CTVotersCount.org
334 Hollister Way West, Glastonbury, CT 06033

Chairs and members of the Committee, my name is Luther Weeks. I am Executive Director of CTVotersCount and a Certified Election Moderator.

H.B. 6113 would decrease turnout, increase voter disenfranchisement, and likely increase absentee voting fraud in Connecticut.

The primary reason to avoid expanded mail-in or no-excuse absentee voting is the opportunity for and documented record of absentee voting fraud(*). There are other reasons:

- Contrary to an often touted benefit – it would **DECREASE** turnout – An academic report showed that early voting, including mail-in voting, decreases turnout by 3%, while an earlier report showed a reduction of 2.6% to 2.9%. (**)
- It would disenfranchise voters, unknowingly, by not providing a warning and an opportunity to revote when they mistakenly overvote or when they make a mistake with the exacting signature and envelope requirements.
- It would disenfranchise voters, when applications or ballots are lost or delayed in the mail.

The Secretary of the State organized an Elections Performance Task Force. She invited Professor Doug Chapin, Director of the Program for Excellence in Election Administration, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, to address the task force, he stated:

“It is like trying to drive a screw with a hammer...Implementing vote by mail, vote centers, or the like, thinking it will have some sort of impact on turnout is misguided, it might, but likely will not... You can have little to no impact on your turn-out bottom line with election laws. Turnout tends to be driven by what’s on the ballot rather than when, where, and how it is available.”

Finally, let me suggest two compromise alternatives to serve the voters of Connecticut with less risk and disenfranchisement:

- Change this bill to allow absentee voting for “electors absent from the town of his or her voting residence for the entire time between 7:00am and 6:00pm”. Or,
- Open absentee voting to anyone by “in-person absentee voting at the Municipal Clerk’s office”, mandating at least 6 weekend hours.

In summary, no-excuse absentee voting is all about convenience, while it would expand opportunities for fraud, disenfranchise voters, and ironically, lower turnout.

Thank you,

(*)Absentee Voting Fraud in General and in Connecticut

The primary reason to avoid expanded mail-in or no-excuse absentee voting is the opportunity for and documented record of fraud – it seems that after every national election we find stories of fraud, prosecution, and conviction based on mail-in voting. We provide links to recent reports in MA, OH, FL, AZ, CA, and TX.

MA: Massive Fraud Scheme, East Longmeadow: <http://www.bradblog.com/?p=9485>
OH: <http://ctvoterscount.org/absentee-ballot-fraud-in-ohio/>
FL: <http://ctvoterscount.org/no-excuse-absentee-voting-unintended-consequences/>
AZ, CA, FL: <http://ctvoterscount.org/absenteeearly-voting-raise-questions-and-risks/>
TX: <http://ctvoterscount.org/how-not-to-increase-voter-participation/>

Not so long ago candidates and party workers in large cities in Connecticut were convicted and penalized for absentee ballot fraud.

Bridgeport Post: *Absentees: Early ballots bring victories, sometimes fraud*
<http://ctvoterscount.org/CTVCdata/11/10/CTPost20111022.pdf>

“In Bridgeport, a hallmark of Democratic Party politics has been the aggressive use of absentee ballots — so aggressive, in fact, that more than a dozen consent decrees have been signed since 1988 with the State Elections Enforcement Commission stemming from allegations of wrongdoing by party operatives.”

CTMirror: **Minnie Gonzalez loses appeal in ballot case**
<http://ctmirror.org/2013/09/03/minnie-gonzalez-loses-appeal-ballot-case/>

“The Connecticut Appellate Court on Tuesday ruled against state Rep. Minnie Gonzalez, D-Hartford, in an absentee ballot case in which she was fined by the State Elections Enforcement Commission. The commission imposed a \$4,500 civil penalty on Gonzalez for four counts of election-law violations, concluding she was “knowingly present” while four voters filled out absentee ballots in the town clerk’s office in Hartford City Hall in the fall of 2006.”

I agree with MIT Professor and security expert Ron Rivest who recommends that:

“Unsupervised remote voting [including absentee voting is] vulnerable to vote-selling, bribery, and coercion. Communication with voter[s], and transmission of ballots, may be unreliable/manipulable”. Rivest concludes that: “Remote voting should be allowed only as needed, for at most 5% of voters”.

<http://www.ctvoterscount.org/ron-rivest-militaryoverseas-internet-voting-risks-and-rewards/>

()Absentee Voting Decreases Turnout**

There is another reason to oppose early voting including no-excuse absentee voting – it does not accomplish its often claimed purpose – it DECREASES turnout - A recent academic report showed that early voting, including mail-in voting, decreases turnout by 3%, while an earlier report showed a reduction of 2.6% to 2.9%.

The recent report is a PEW supported University of Wisconsin study. The earlier report from, 2007, is by researchers at the University of San Diego and Temple University.

We provide links to the reports and a New York Times Op-Ed by the authors of the most recent report.
<http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewcenteronthestatesorg/Initiatives/MVW/UWisconsin.pdf>
<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~tkousser/votebyemail.htm>

And an article covering concerns with mail-in voting:
<http://californiawatch.org/dailyreport/cheaper-popular-mail-ballots-worry-critics-7479>