

Dear Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Daniel J. Fox, and Distinguished Members of the GAE Committee,

My name is Mary Doherty and I am a resident of Southbury, CT. I am submitting testimony in support of HJ 161: A RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW FOR EARLY VOTING AND NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING.

One of the hallmarks of a true Democracy is the right for all citizens to vote in a free and fair election. Good governance at all levels (local, state, and federal) must ensure that all citizens have equal access to the ballot. Changing the CT Constitution to allow for several early voting days and no-excuse absentee voting is a logical step towards increasing citizens' access to vote.

I am an advocate of early voting for many reasons, however one of the most compelling reasons in my opinion is to offer working people an alternative to getting to the polls between 6 am and 8 pm on the first Tuesday of November. In addition to working long hours, many workers have long commutes to and from work as well as school aged children whom they drive to and from school. Even if they find a convenient time to arrive at their polling place, there is no guarantee that they will not face long lines and be unable to meet their other obligations on time. Often times in the "land of steady habits" people make the argument that if citizens value voting that they will find the time to show up at the polls. However, this totally disregards the lived experienced of many working people in this country.

I am an advocate of no-excuse absentee voting. One reason for no-excuse absentee voting is to offer seniors and their caregivers an alternative to getting to the polls as this is often a hardship for them. I know about this firsthand for two reasons:

- 1.) I have a mother who is 90 years old and is legally blind. She has voted in CT elections since 2012. Prior to 2012 she lived in Florida and voted absentee for many years. When she first moved to CT and began voting here, I would bring her to the polls and get permission to help her complete her ballot. Within the last several years I have helped her complete an absentee ballot application and absentee ballot for each primary, municipal, general, and presidential election. Last year I was informed that she qualified for a permanent absentee ballot so we applied for permanent absentee ballot status and this has greatly simplified her ability to vote. However, none of this process in CT is voter-friendly, and if my mother did not have someone advocating on her behalf, it is likely she would be disenfranchised. Please keep in mind that many elderly people do not have people advocating for them. (Also the contrast between absentee voting in Florida and CT is night and day. The process in Florida is much more voter friendly.)
- 2.) I volunteered during the 2017 and 2018 elections to reach out to registered voters who had voted absentee in the past, and the majority of those I contacted were at least 80 years of age. I inquired as to whether or not they would be voting absentee in the upcoming election, and offered to send them an absentee ballot application if they needed one. Often times people forget or are unaware that the CT absentee voting process needs to be initiated quite a few weeks in advance in order to get an absentee ballot to the polls on time:
  - A voter needs an application to start the process. They can get an application by picking one up at their town hall, having the town clerk's office mail them one, or printing one from their town's website.

- They complete the application. In order to qualify to vote absentee they must pick one of six reasons as to why they need to vote absentee:
  - a. Illness.
  - b. Physical disability.
  - c. Absence from town during all of the hours of voting.
  - d. Religious beliefs forbidding secular activity on Election Day.
  - e. Serving as an election official at a polling place other than your own.
  - f. Active service in the Armed Forces.
  
- They need to either mail the application back to town hall or drop it off in person.
- The application is processed by the town hall clerk's office, and an absentee ballot is mailed to the citizen.
- The voter completes the ballot and either mails it back to town hall, drops it off in person, or designates a person to drop it off for them.
- They must complete this process for EVERY primary, municipal, general, and presidential election.

Often times it is seniors who would benefit most from voting absentee. Yet even though they may be ailing/infirm and quite advanced in age, they do not perceive themselves as meeting one of the six criteria for absentee voting. However, my conversations with them clearly indicate that getting to the polls is a hardship for them and creates much unnecessary anguish in their lives. (I am inclined to believe many of them never make it to the polls.)

I expect CT legislators to demonstrate their support of working people and seniors by ensuring that CT establishes an early voting period and enacts no-excuse absentee voting.