

***Dear Members of the GAE Committee:***

***650,000 Connecticut residents voted by Absentee Ballot last November, all of whom were grateful to vote from the safety of their homes and deposit their ballots in the drop box at their town hall. I was shocked to learn this method of voting is not available in future elections.***

***Connecticut has some of the most restrictive voting laws in the nation built into its constitution. Because of the pandemic, Gov. Lamont signed an executive order allowing all registered voters in Connecticut to vote absentee and by extension, vote early because absentee ballots could be returned before Election Day in 2020. This effort was so successful that last year 35% of ballots cast were by absentee, compared to the 4% who voted absentee in previous elections and the absentee ballot rejection rate was less than 1%, the lowest in history, according to Secretary of the State, Denise Merrill.***

***There are so many unforeseen circumstances that can make it impossible for a voter to get to the polls on election day; illness (their own or a family member), a change in work schedule or an extra long shift (think of medical workers and first responders), a death in the family, a weather event or even a vehicle that won't start. We should be doing everything we can to encourage participation by all eligible voters in our democracy and that means we need to amend the CT constitution to allow for early voting and vote by mail.***

***Secretary Merrill's office conducted a poll in January that found a majority of Connecticut voters favor early and no-excuse absentee voting. Bills H.J. No. 58 and H.J. 59 address those voting reforms. I urge you to support these bills and vote them out of committee. It's time to give Connecticut residents the choices they deserve when they vote.***

***Thank you,***

***Diana Neff***

***Glastonbury, CT***