

Hi,

I'm writing to support legislation to make Early Voting and No Excuse Absentee Voting permanent in Connecticut.

Despite temporary reforms to accommodate COVID, Connecticut still lags behind when it comes to voter access. Please consider enacting:

1. A constitutional amendment to allow all registered voters to vote by absentee ballot without an "excuse"
2. A constitutional amendment to allow early, in-person voting
3. Legislation to allow for absentee ballots to be counted early
4. Legislation to implement automatic voter registration (AVR) and update the online voter registration (OVR) system
5. Legislation to restore voting rights for individuals on parole

These steps are commonsense, bipartisan, long overdue, and will make Connecticut a national leader when it comes to voter access and voting rights. The 2020 election was the first time our state allowed all voters to vote by absentee ballot – and it was an incredible success, with close to 700,000 (more than one in three) voters choosing to vote absentee, and fewer than 1% of ballots rejected. Connecticut also did the right thing by passing legislation that allowed municipal officials the ability to pre-process absentee ballots early, which gave local registrars and election workers the time they needed to ensure that results would be tabulated quickly, accurately and transparently. As a result, Connecticut avoided the weeks of uncertainty that other states encountered, and upheld the strength of our democratic process. This session, we have the chance to make these temporary reforms permanent - we can't afford to let that opportunity pass us by.

Connecticut must also take this historic opportunity to join the 44 other states across the country that allow in-person early voting. Early voting is a simple step that would make our voting process more

accessible while helping to cut down on Election Day lines. For many working families, getting to the polls on Election Day is no easy task, forcing some to choose between family and work obligations, and their civic duty. With early voting, they would no longer be forced to make that choice.

Enacting early voting, as well as expanding absentee ballot voting, would require a constitutional amendment, like the one proposed by Secretary Merrill. We agree with Secretary Merrill that voters shouldn't have to wait years for these reforms to become reality – the time for these reforms is now.

It's also time for Connecticut to pass automatic voter registration (AVR) into law. Implementing AVR will help hundreds of thousands of new voters automatically register. By reducing paperwork and streamlining the process of voter registration when residents interact with state agencies, AVR will allow Connecticut to modernize our elections and keep our voter rolls up to date, while ultimately saving taxpayer dollars at a time when lawmakers will be making difficult choices to address the budget deficit. We also urge the legislature to take this opportunity to support updating our online voter registration (OVR) system by allowing people to register to vote with a social security number in case they do not have a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) ID. Doing so will help bring our registration system into the 21st century and make the process, faster, as well as more open and accessible to all eligible residents.

Restoring voting rights for individuals on parole is an issue that strikes at the heart of social and racial justice. Stripping the right to vote from those on parole, is an act of disenfranchisement that has disproportionately impacted communities of color in Connecticut for far too long. By restoring the right to vote for people on parole, Connecticut can begin to remove barriers to voting for thousands of people, and help welcome back individuals looking to re-engage in their communities. Every electorate in Connecticut should be able to

exercise their right to vote and receive representation – including those who are re-entering society.

In 2019, AVR passed in the House but was left in the Senate until the last day of session, ultimately never getting brought up for a final vote. We can't afford to let that happen again – Connecticut voters deserve action on voting rights and voter access this session. That's why I am writing today to strongly urge our legislative leaders to make these issues a priority.

Sincerely,
Emily Wade Adams

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