

Honorable Committee Members:

I am writing to oppose H.J. No 58 Resolution proposing a state constitutional amendment to allow no-excuse absentee voting.

As an immigrant, I observed a few local elections with great amazement and admiration. The two sides, often just ordinary citizens who are taking up a task and aspiration to serve the public, ran their campaign with so many endless hours, so much financial and emotional investment. But once the votes were counted and the winners were declared, the room was filled with hugs and warm words. This magnificent force of unity is built upon the trust of a transparent yet private voting system: in a very narrow time window and at a defined space, with so many local residents as poll workers and volunteers and observers, under so many pairs of watchful eyes of your neighbors and friends and other town folks, with strict privacy on how people voted. There is very little room for doubt. A simple action of filling out a ballot and trusting the outcome over a seemingly chaotic voting day ensured the solid foundation of a balanced society.

Absentee voting system, contrary to traditional in person vote, happens without any viable mechanism of public monitoring, nor any guarantee of voting privacy other than a few words of assurance from voting officials. A handful of people in a few offices control the whole voting process out of public observations. The fact that the public has to be repeatedly assured of voting integrity by state officials speaks to the fatal flaw of absentee voting: it lacks a mechanism with which to acquire public trust.

The fact that everyone can vote does not necessarily lead to a true democracy on its own; we have to have transparency and public monitoring at the same time. Fostering strong societal trust in our democratic processes is essential. Absentee voting is fundamentally a process that cannot instill the same degree of trust from the public as in-person balloting can, for without strong community oversight over elections, there can be neither full transparency nor trust in our system. America's strength derives from the people's confidence in our democracy, and a system of no-excuse absentee voting inherently erodes this confidence.

The stability and prosperity built upon a trustworthy election process is too precious to risk. This should not be a partisan issue; this is not a debate about whether Absentee voting favors any one party. Rather, this is a question of whether a slight increase in voter convenience is worth jeopardizing the core values of transparency, community, and voter confidence that lie at the heart of American democracy.

I respectfully ask you to vote NO to H.J. No 58.

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