

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5001 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING FOR ALL AND VARIOUS OTHER

Title: REFORMS TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS.

Vote Date: 3/23/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/13/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill is instituting the constitutional amendment that was passed by the voters of Connecticut. The amendment removed the restriction on the legislature from altering the acceptable reasons for using an absentee ballot. This bill would enact the will of the people of Connecticut by removing the current requirements on absentee ballots and will allow voters to use absentee ballots without an excuse. The bill also alters several election statutes that would simplify and enhance the election process.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

Consolidates inner and outer envelope into one return envelope and replaces serial numbers with unique ballot IDs; amends authority for certain committees to distribute absentee ballot applications; establishes curing procedures for invalid absentee ballots; changes the deadline for delivering ballots for counting; expands permanent absentee ballot eligibility; narrows provisions on use of electronic absentee voting; eliminates SOTS study on in-person voter registration; make a minor change to when voter qualifications may be examined; modifies procedures for filing complaints with the AG concerning town clerks; amends RLA procedures.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Stephanie Thomas, Secretary of State, Connecticut:

I wish to focus on a few revisions that will best serve voters.

Sections 1 thru 6

Remove the statutory list currently required to expand eligibility for absentee voting:

We cannot support some of the procedure changes as written:

If implementing universal access to absentee voting to remain secure, transparent and manageable the systems must be modernized. The system does not provide voters an opportunity to cure errors in returned absentee ballots and does not have a ballot tracking system that allows voters to follow their ballot. Currently absentee ballots are not opened until Election Day but if voting expands significantly local officials will need to begin processing absentee ballots earlier. We recommend a establishing a permanent absentee ballot list and including it in concert with our early voting system. We suggest a middle ground that provides security and efficiency without stalling voter access: Year 1 Include ballot curling, tracking, conversion to one envelop and aligning the procedure with early voting. Year 2 Include the removal of on-government circulators, establish a permanent absentee ballot list and align with early voting.

When voters understand the rules thru education on deadlines and safeguard, we install public trust in the integrity and security of our elections.

William Tong, Attorney General, State of Connecticut:

Our state like many others is facing the dynamic threats to our election administration. Election protection needs every aspect of government ready to act including giving local and state election officials additional tools to bring legal action to prevent interference. The bill makes clear that threats, violence or weapons are not welcomed or allowed in election spaces. Section 13 provides a process for my office to be notified of actions of individuals or entities to obtain inappropriate access to important election infrastructure or information. This provides my office with the relevant and timely information we need to assist in preventing seizure of election records or infrastructure. Section 14 establisher a process to empower my office to seek and obtain a court order in the event individuals within or outside the state attempt to interfere with our election administration process. Under our Constitution administration of elections is a state power. It is important we do everything to protect our elections.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Martin M. Looney, Senator, State of Connecticut:

Senate Democrats:

Absentee voting is responsible, safe and important to our voters. Any time we limit a person's ability to vote is a threat to the fabric of our nation. This bill allows voting regardless of circumstances by allowing each vote to vote by absentee ballot.

Lisa Amatruda, Co-Chair ROVAC Legislative Committee:

The Registrars of Voters Association or Connecticut supports the bill with the exception of Section 11 beginning with line 269. We do not agree that Registrars of Voters are independently elected officials and should be treated as other elected officials. Granting the Secretary of State, the authority to suspend registrars from their duties while under investigation is inappropriate. Elected officials should not be presumed guilty and required to prove their innocence to continue to serve. Many Deputy Registrars of Voters are not fully trained, and current statues do not require deputies to receive training. If both registrars were suspended during an investigation who would administer and run the elections.

Tyler Mack, Policy and Advocacy Strategist, Connecticut Project Action Fund:

We at the Connecticut Project Action Fund believe that eligible voters who take the time and responsibility to vote should be able to make their voices heard even if they can't make it to their specific polling location. Working class people often have multiple jobs, unpredictable schedules, or trying to make ends meet and it is hard to stand in line to vote on a certain day. Absentee voting is a helpful option that makes ballot box more accessible and fairer for working class voters. In 2024 over 800,000 resident's voters to create this legislation. It is time to strengthen our democracy and make our election system accessible to everyone who wants to vote.

Paula Bacolini, Founder, Make Voting Easy CT:

Having lived in Glastonbury for over 40 years I like reform and so does 60% of CT voters that passed a referendum in 2024 to allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting.

Lori Brown, Executive Director, CT League of Conservation Voters:

CTLCV supports Section 1 to modernize and our election laws. The public passed the referendum does not codify the process. The Governor's emergency Executive Orders allowed votes to choose a safer way to cast their ballot and helped those who have difficulty voting in person. The result was safer elections and an increase in voter participation. When more have to make their voices heard it encourages people to be involved and strengthens democracy for all.

Lisa Del Sesto, President, Connecticut Chapter of the National Organization of Women:

Connecticut voters believe voting should be accessible, secure and convenient. I recognize the challenges women face juggling work, caring for children and family and civic life. As we expand access to voting it is important to ensure the system works well for others and election officials. Improving permanent absentee ballot lists, secure ballot tracking, improve ballot curling and secure drop boxes will ensure Connecticut continues to lead the nation in protecting access to the ballot while maintaining election integrity.

Jessica Englert, Senior Policy Advisor, Responsive Gov Action:

We support the bill with a few recommendations to strengthen it. A few safeguards and clarification will help ensure voters casting ballots may do so smoothly and effectively.

First: Include a notice-and-cure process. Thirty-three states use these procedures, and it reduces ballot rejection significantly. There are concerns about implementation timelines but there are many free resources available to help implement notice-and-cure.

Second: Section 29 requires voters to return an absentee ballot in person the day before the election while allowing a voter's designee to return the ballot on Elections Day. No other state makes this distinction and aligning these deadlines could help avoid voter confusion and improve ballot return rates.

Third: Section 23 and 26 require certain voters to receive ballots electronically. Some voters may prefer mail delivery and it may be preferable to make electronic delivery of ballots the default.

Finally, the absentee eligibility language refers to those who will not "appear" on Election Day. This creates unnecessary ambiguity and does not clearly cover voters who "appear" during early voting. It may be simpler to state that any eligible voter may vote by absentee ballot.

Benjamin Fuller, Co-Director, Voting Technology Research Center:

We advocate adopting risk-limiting audits that provide a cost-effective means for checking the veracity of an election. RLA's provide confidence in tabulated errors, errors arising from incorrect reporting of tabulator totals and centralized aggregation errors. RLA's lead to more transparent and trustworthy elections and rigorous conclusions of correctness. They can be carried out at a fraction of the cost and have been thoroughly studied by the scientific community. RLA's are now deployed in over 18 states. We do suggest changes to military personnel, individuals with disabilities and electors living or traveling abroad on election day. We suggest replacing the current provision with a formation of a committee to evaluate the risks and benefits in Internet voting.

Lisa Lucarelli Chandler, Founder, CT River Huddle Indivisible:

Our work is to defend democracy, educate our members on their voting rights and ensure voting is accessible to every CT citizen. The bill includes improvements as

- Allowing voters, a permanent absentee ballot list

- Removing reasons to use an absentee ballot

- Improving ballot curing to be able to fix mistakes

- High speed tabulators

- Secure accessible drop boxes

These will ensure Connecticut leads the nation in protecting access to ballots while maintaining election integrity.

J. McBride, Greater Hartford Gives Foundation:

As part of our efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve social and economic mobility we support civic and resident engagement in our region. We are committed to expanding community voice and leadership and research shows consistently low rates of voter registration and turnout among our particular regions. We support removing statutory restrictions on eligibility for absentee voting to ensure that all eligible Connecticut voters have access to the ballot box. Civic participation includes voting is one of the most important ways for people to weigh in on local and national issues affecting our lives.

Ann Reed, Vice President for Advocacy, League of Women Voters of Connecticut:

We believe in policies that encourage and promote participation in the voting process. It is imperative we implement universal or no-excuse absentee voting truly accessible for every eligible voter in Connecticut. This bill takes the first step implementing no-excuse voting in particular for those who have difficulty getting to the polls because of a physical disability or those with little job flexibility, people lacking childcare and those who are incarcerated. We support building on the bill by including:

- A permanent absentee ballot list, postage-paid return envelopes with ballots, expand secure ballot drop boxes, provide secure ballot tracking, improve ballot curing, allow ballots to be processed before election day and expand absentee voting without reducing early voting days.

We would like to see lines 863-885 removed because it would put voter's ballots at risk and undermine confidence in election results.

Rachel Khanna, Selectwoman, Town of Greenwich:

As a former State Representative, I am aware that it is essential in the most fundamental way that eligible voters have access to the ballot in a secure way and they are not subjected to intimidation or made to feel unsafe.

Verified Voting, Jay Coles, Chrissa LaPorte:

Verified Voting is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization whose mission is to strengthen democracy for all voters. Since its founding computer scientists have promoted voter verified paper ballots and routine, rigorous post-election audits to check the accuracy of computerized voting systems. Risk-limiting audits (RLA's) are robust tabulation audits designed to confirm that election outcomes match. Connecticut would join a number of states conducting RLA's who regularly conduct them before election results are finalized. The language gives the Secretary of State the authority to develop procedures and regulations. The legislation could be improved by strengthening the RLA language. We suggest reconsidering the requirement to audit U.S. House and General Assembly contests because of a close tie or vote. Clarify the current manual or electronic audits following elections in addition to the RLA.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Council, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut:

Voting is the foundation of democracy and the importance of voting cannot be overstated. Problems created by Connecticut's limited voting options were on display during the November 2020 election. Limited voting has historically harmed Black voters and voters of color. A truly equitable and accessible no-excuse absentee voting system will require continuous work. There are additional opportunities to strengthen the accessibility, reliability, and voter confidence of no-excuse voting beyond the initial framework by removing excuses for absentee voting. We have included in our testimony many recommendations.

Stacey Zimmerman, Deputy Director, SEIU CT State Council:

Removing restrictions on who may vote absentee allows all votes in Connecticut to vote without an excuse enacting the will of the voters. A strong absentee voting system should, allow for voters to opt into a permanent absentee ballot list, provide postage-paid envelopes, expand secure ballot drop boxes, provide secure ballot tracking, improve ballot curling, allow election officials to process before Election Day and expand absentee voting without reducing early voting days. This bill gets us closer to making a voting system that works for everyone.

Mary Consoli, League of Women Voters, Northern Fairfield County:

During Covid 19 the legislature made it possible for all eligible voters to vote by absentee. It was a positive experience as evident with the number of ballots received. As a league member I knocked on doors to educate voters about their ability to vote by absentee without excuse. Many appreciate this information and opportunity. As President of my nurses' local I know of nurses who were working on Election Day, and many missed the time deadline to cast a ballot in person. All health care workers could continue to vote by No Excuse Absentee.

Antoinette Spinelli, Legislative Co-Chair, Connecticut Town Clerks Association:

The town clerks support Sections 1 and 3 which eliminates the six statutory reasons required to vote by absentee ballot. This presents an opportunity to improve the absentee ballot process by making it more transparent and efficient. We recommend redesigning the absentee ballot packet, improve ballot tracking for votes. moving to a single-envelope system and attempting to contact any voter whose returned envelope lacks a signature. We cannot comment on the feasibility of implementing a system for electronic ballot return but recognize that Section 28 establishes a very high security and verification standard. We urge including funding for the Secretary of State and municipal grants for Registrars of Voters and Town Clerks.

John Erlingheuser, Senior Advisor, AARP:

The right to vote is one of our most fundamental civic and constitutional rights and recent elections have highlighted barriers that make voting more difficult. AARP supports expanding access to the ballot and promoting full participation in the electoral process. Connecticut needs to modernize its voting systems to provide residents with a greater range of voting options including no excuse absentee voting. We support eliminating statutory restrictions on absentee ballot eligibility and allowing any eligible elector or referendum vote who will not appear at their polling place to vote on election day.

Samuel Gold, Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments:

The bill improves efficiency in the voting process, provides security for ballots, ensures proper investigation of elections-related violations clarifies and corrects inconsistencies in statutes. RiverCOG encourages support for the bill.

Mendi Blue Paca, President & CEO, Fairfield County's Community Foundation:

We serve 23 towns and work closely with community organizations, nonprofits, businesses, philanthropists to address challenges and opportunities to create a Fairfield County where everyone has a fair opportunity to thrive. The Foundation led Get-Out-The-Vote campaigns focusing on education and engaging residents about the importance of voting and the integrity of our election system. This bill directly supports and advances these goals. The current limitations of the law fail to reflect the realities of modern life.

Abigail Anderson, Bridgeport:

I support universal absentee voting for several reasons including as an effective way to address the abuses of absentee voting. Eligible voters face logistics or personal obstacles on Election Day their limitations may be demanding work schedules, long lines at polling places, unreliable transportation or job time off. Providing a ballot to every registered voter removes barriers and allows for broader access.

Leslie Brody, Sherman:

I urge the committee to strengthen the bill by adding the following:

- Permanent Absentee Ballot (Not Time-Limited)
- Ballot Curling (3-7 days post-election)
- Ballot Tracking with Automated Notification
- Pre-Election Day Processing
- Prepaid Return Postage for Absentee Ballots

Tim Gabriele, North Haven,

Connecticut has taken steps to implement early voting, but this is the next step. Allowing no excuse absentee voting is a preferred method for those who are often among our most vulnerable. No excuse absentee voting was passed by mandate in the 2024 election is not the time to put what voters demanded into practice.

Gail Gagnon, East Hartford:

Connecticut voters approved reform because they believe voting should be accessible, secure, and convenient for all. A secure system that works well includes improvements such as permanent absentee ballot lists, secure ballot tracking, improved ballot curing and secure drop boxes. During Covid I had critically ill family and neighbors that needed to vote by absentee ballot. Create a strong absentee voting system that also includes:

Permanent Absentee Ballot List
Postage-paid return envelopes
Secure ballots drop boxes
Secure ballot tracking
Improve ballot curling
Allow election officials to process before Election Day
And expand absentee voting without reducing early voting days.

The following testified in support of the bill:

Julie Badion, Westport	Michael Jacobson
Sheila Bennett, Greenwich	Diane Jamieson, Thompson
Justin Bergner, Greenwich	Anne Lampert
Gail Berritt, Westport	Rhea Klein, Bolton
Steve Blocklin, South Windsor	Marie Lheureux, Glastonbury
Jane Chisholm, East Haddam	Anne Marshall, Norwalk
Karen Cook	Angela Mazur, Avon
Alison Correia, Plantsville	Judy Stone, Westport
Jan DeAngelo, Greenwich	Sally Turner
Felicia DeDominicis	John Watson
Dean Delach, Farmington	Jane Wilson, Avon
George Dobbs, South Windsor	Susan Singer, New Canaan
Jill Drew, Sharon	Marianne Schorer, Greenwich
Karen Edwards, Stamford	Katherine Salk
Nancy Elman, Guilford	Wendy Rehnberg
Bobbie Essagof	Kathy Purtell
Mary Finnegan, Branford	Frances Moulder, Torrington
Michelle Greenburg, Greenwich	Kara Jackson, Stamford
Holly Greenfield	Diane Hoffman, Hamden
Harald Hille, Riverside	Lynne Bonnett, New Haven
Kenneth Speyer, New Britain	
Four Anonymous	

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut

The Brennan Center for Justice

Connecticut Citizen Action Group

Common Cause Connecticut

League of Women Voters Connecticut

Democracy Campaign

Verified Voting

The following organizations share commitment to ensure all voters can exercise their right to vote however the legislation to allow electronic ballot return, via the language in lines 863-885 put voters' ballots at risk and undermine confidence in election results. No federal certification standards exist for electronic ballot return systems. We urge removal of the language in the bill which authorizes electronic ballot return. This would be counter to the unified assessment

of national security experts, cybersecurity professionals, federal intelligence agencies and leading academic researchers.

Luther Weeks, Computer Scientist and Executive Director, Connecticut Voters Count:

Reports by scientists and technologists reach the same conclusions that internet voting is not safe for public elections. Internet voting provides challenges as concluded by the CISA, Verified Voting, U.S. Vote Foundation, the Heritage Group and federal cyber security groups. It is impossible to provide post-election audits without voter verified paper ballots. This is a flawed concept. Remove it from the bill.

Christina D:

Say no to internet. We know machines and you are proposing more fraud with online ballots. No online ballots allowed.

Two Anonymous also opposed the bill.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: April 7, 2026