

Testimony re: 26 House 7007, An Act Relating to Elections – Mail Ballots

Positions: For

My name is Annette Bourbonniere, and I live in Newport, Rhode Island.

Voting is a basic constitutional right for all American citizens, but it can be challenging for many.

For our members of our military stationed overseas or even in a state that is not their permanent residence, for US citizens working overseas, or in a state that is not their permanent residence, and for all eligible voters with disabilities who are unable to get to the polls on election day, voting by mail has been the solution needed to access this constitutional right. Adding the ability to vote electronically provides even better access to this right.

We cannot argue that we must do all that is possible to ensure the members of the military who risk their lives for this country, for this constitution. US citizens who are temporarily working in a state outside of their voting district are likewise provided access that allows them to exercise their constitutional right.

For persons with disabilities, a population of which I am one of many members, it can be the only access to this right. I'm sure Rhode Islanders with other disabilities will speak to how it makes such a difference to them, so I will address how it affects those who are blind and those of us with significant mobility disabilities.

Being able to use electronic ballots will enable people who are blind or have low vision to use screen readers to read their ballots. This will allow them to vote independently with full information. It is the use of technology that empowers people. They will not have to find transportation to the polls or ask for assistance at the polls. They will have the access they need at their own computers.

For those of us with mobility disabilities, getting to the polling place and waiting for the “accessible” voting machine to be available are challenges. This is especially so in a state like Rhode Island, which has limited public transportation. Even polling places that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act may not be as accessible as many of us need them to be. Electronic voting ensures that we will be able to vote.

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Another part of this bill, another reason that this bill empowers those of us who cannot access polling places on a particular day, is that secure (as described in the bill) electronic voting eliminates the possibility of votes being lost in the mail, as well as the destruction of so-called mail ballot drop boxes. It also eliminates having to look for such drop boxes.

Again, voting is our constitutional right. It is the power of the American people. It must be as available as possible. That is what this bill will ensure for Rhode Island voters.

Thank you to the sponsors who submitted this bill, and thank you to this committee for your consideration of it.

Submitted by,

Annette Bourbonnierre