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Opinion

Opinion: Legislature must act on absentee ballots

By Carol Reimers Updated 5:21 pm EDT, Thursday, June 11, 2020



An election worker processes absentee ballots in Wisconsin earlier this year.

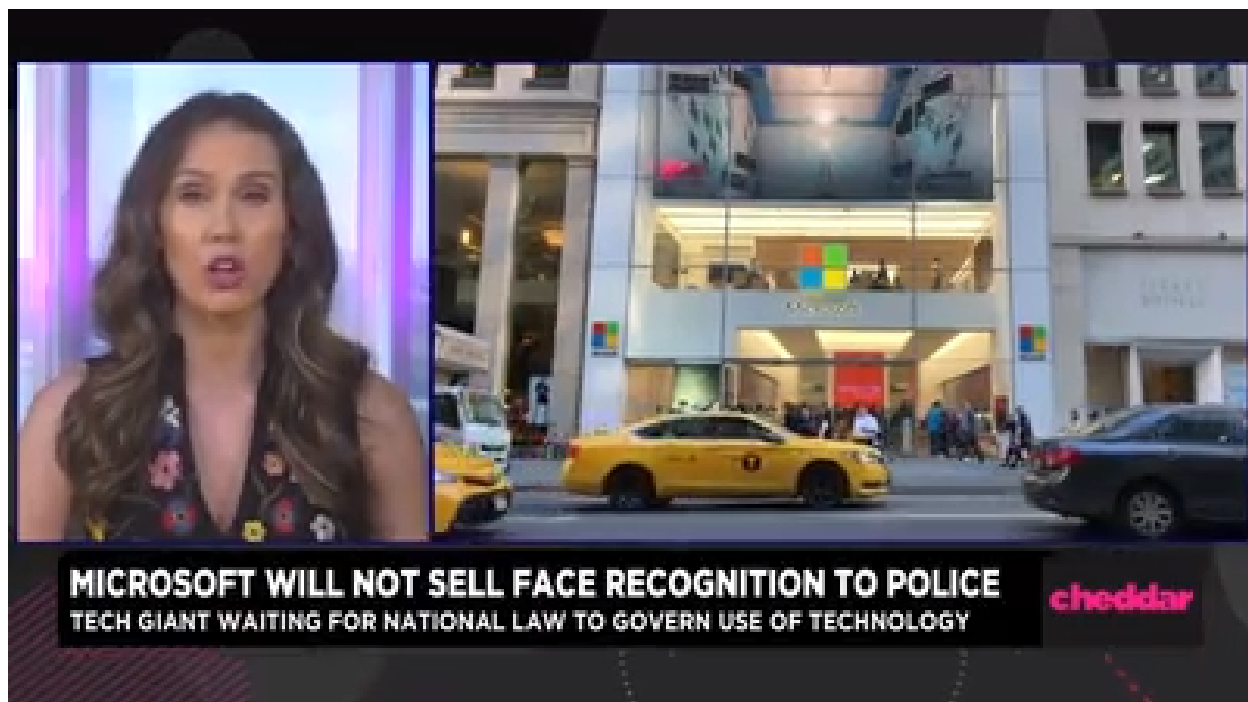
It is critical that our fall elections are carried out in a way that assures voters and election workers can participate safely and that affirms the public's trust in the outcome.

All eligible voters must have the choice of casting their vote by absentee ballot or in person in the 2020 elections. Election officials need time to prepare adequately for both in order to ensure safety for voters and poll workers alike.

In Connecticut, voting by absentee ballot is the only mail-in voting procedure available to us in 2020. The governor has issued an executive order to permit the use of an

absentee ballot for any reason in the Connecticut primary elections on Aug. 11.

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Now it's time for the Legislature to act in time to adequately prepare for the Nov. 3 general election. Seeking to avoid illness during a pandemic should be among the allowable reasons to vote by absentee ballot. Legislative leaders need to call a special session in June and make it legally permissible to use an absentee ballot for fear of sickness from COVID-19 in November 2020.

How do we "affirm the public's trust in the outcome" and ensure that our absentee ballot procedure is secure? In "**Security Features of Voting by Absentee/Mailed Ballots**," the National Conference of State Legislatures says that "In several ways, absentee/mailed ballots are as secure or more secure than traditional methods of voting." In Connecticut there are many guardrails to protect the security of elections.

Here are a few:

Registrars of Voters and Town Clerks are required by the Secretary of the State's office to keep their voter lists up to date and ensure that only eligible voters participate in our elections.

Every city/town is required to have two elected registrars of voters, one Republican and one Democrat. Once elected, they cease to be party members and are sworn to uphold and protect the right of every voter, regardless of party affiliation. Town clerks are also elected. They are responsible for vital records, deaths, marriage licenses, etc. as well as administering absentee ballots.

For in-depth look at all regulations governing absentee voting, see the **CT General Statutes**

For an in-depth look at all regulations governing in-person voting, see https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_146.htm

Real voter fraud is very rare, as found in many research reports provided by the Brennan Center in Resources on Voter Fraud Claims. Credible allegations of voter fraud must be thoroughly investigated and addressed through processes established by the **State Election Enforcement Commission**. A legislator can also raise a bill to compel a specific city or town to have a certified election monitor for cause and provide state funds for such a decision.

While fraud is clearly unacceptable, the LWVCT is committed to finding solutions that address actual problems instead of imposing policies that make it harder for Connecticut's citizens to participate in our democracy.

One month ago, on May 4, Secretary of the State Denise Merrill introduced her plan **“Overcoming Adversity During the COVID-19 Crisis”** to “prepare for every eventuality” in the 2020 election season. The Legislature needs to “put in place the legal authorities necessary to overcome disruptions to the election calendar.” Election officials and poll workers need to have sufficient time and resources to implement this “safe, secure and accessible” plan that will be supported in large part by emergency funds made available from the federal government because of the COVID-19 emergency.

While we recognize there are challenges for the General Assembly to meet during a pandemic, other states have found safe solutions. It's time for the Legislature to act on this without delay in a special session. The General Assembly's choice on providing the legal authority to protect voters' rights and safety needs to be known. Voters' safety and the public's trust in election outcomes demand no less.

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