

January 22, 2018

To: Members of the Senate Election Law and Internal Affairs Committee

From: Joan Flood Ashwell, Durham, NH

Re: Opposition to SB 527 re ID for absentee voting

Most members of this committee will remember that for more than a decade, I was the Election Law Specialist for the League of Women Voters NH. Although I no longer hold that position I continue my interest, as a citizen, in voting in New Hampshire.

I reluctantly had to stop attending legislative sessions because of my rheumatoid arthritis and macular degeneration. For those who aren't familiar with those chronic conditions, arthritis makes it very difficult to get around most days and can cause enough swelling that things like writing are difficult. Macular degeneration usually leads to blindness although, in my case, recent new treatments have helped restore much of my eyesight after 16 months of serious vision loss.

I bring this up because in 2016, I voted absentee for town elections, the September State Primary and the General Election. A friend drove me to the polls for the Presidential Primary.

My health issues are recent enough that I still have a current driver's license and a current passport. I don't expect I will be renewing either document. What am I supposed to do then? My signature certainly no longer matches the one I gave when registering to vote in NH 20 years ago. In fact, my signature doesn't match the one from yesterday. That's not unusual when swollen joints and vision loss are involved - a common problem for many older people.

New Hampshire has a shockingly old population. This bill, SB 527, would adversely affect older citizens in great numbers and, obviously, anyone with disabilities at any age. Here are just some of the problems from one older citizen's perspective:

- Parking lots can be a real challenge. Even with handicapped parking places, finding one can be difficult and the walk to the checklist table can be daunting.
- Durham has made great efforts to be accessible and move lines quickly but with 7,000 or more voters, it can be difficult for people to stand in line waiting to check in, vote, and then stand in line again to run the ballot through the scanner.
- The choice of disabled voting alternatives is a joke. I attended a session on how it operates and the most obvious revelation was that no one with a disability was involved in choosing the system.

- The idea that everyone has a computer, knows how to scan an ID (if they have one), and can attach it to a document is absurd. Half of New Hampshire is lucky if it has any internet service at all.
- For those of us who find the act of going to the polls impossible, the thought of going out, finding an accessible building, and then, finding a government official to sign a notarized statement is ridiculous. If we had the energy and a friend to drive us to do those things we wouldn't be voting absentee.
- Why do disabled people have to show IDs twice in order to vote? It's bad enough that New Hampshire has designed its ID laws to eliminate many otherwise qualified young voters. Now the state wants to add extra regulations to eliminate older, disabled voters – both without explanation other than the fact it makes it easier for the minority party to win elections.

This is one of the most mean-spirited, nasty pieces of legislation I have seen in at least 15 years of following legislation in the NH Statehouse. I urge the Senate Election Law and Internal Affairs Committee to vote "Inexpedient to Legislate" on SB 527.

Joan Flood Ashwell

Durham, NH