



4 Park St Room 200  
Concord, NH 03301

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To: House Election Law Chair and committee members  
From: Liz Tentarelli, president, League of Women Voters NH  
contact: [LWVnewhampshire@gmail.com](mailto:LWVnewhampshire@gmail.com)

**Re: HB418 restricting absentee voting**

I personally and on behalf of the non-partisan League of Women Voters New Hampshire urge this committee to **recommend ITL** on **HB418**.

This bill to limit access to absentee ballots to only those people who are absent from their towns on voting day or have a disability ignores two things:  
years of New Hampshire tradition that recognizes the **fundamental right and value of voting**  
and  
the **individual circumstances** that may keep someone from getting to the polls despite a strong desire to vote.

This bill completely ignores the plight of thousands of voter on town meeting voting day, in three years among the past 10, **when major storms hit NH and getting to the polls was dangerous**. In 2018 (I think) the legislature recognized the need of some voters to vote absentee the day before rather than risk their lives trying to drive or walk to the polls during a snowstorm. Please, those of you with four wheel drive, remember that not everyone has a car that does well in snow, and walking along a snow-covered roadway is dangerous.

This bill also ignores those whose **health or age may make being in a crowd or standing for hours in line dangerous**. I moved last fall to a continuing care retirement community, where many of the residents voted absentee. Some don't consider themselves "disabled" so much as merely unable to do what they once could. A few days after the election one woman who lives there told me her story of voting in person on Nov. 4. I'm attaching Jean's letter to this testimony. She and her husband have difficulty walking, so they were daunted when they got to the Manchester Ward 12 polling place and found no parking nearby and very long lines. I was in that line for over 90 minutes earlier in the day. Their story has a happy ending thanks to the efforts of the poll workers, but next time they should have the option to vote absentee.

This bill also ignores the **long and sometimes unpredictable hours that people work**. A 12-hour hospital shift, for example, may overlap completely with the hours that polls are open. Fire-fighters and law enforcement may also find themselves at an incident site and unable to leave at the time expected. Surely their right to vote absentee, in advance, shows good planning.

A few years ago the Legislature changed the absentee ballot application language to recognize the **voting right of someone incarcerated or awaiting trial to vote**, even if technically their home residence and the jail are in the same town so they're not "absent" from the town.

**The NH Secretary of State's website lists these reasons for voting absentee:**

"You can vote absentee in any election if you are unable to vote in person because:

- You will be out of town on election day; *or*
- You have a religious observance that prevents you from voting in person; *or*
- You have a physical disability or illness that prevents you from voting in person; *or*
- You have an employment commitment or must care for an adult or child during the entire time polls are open; *or*
- You are confined in a penal institution for a conviction of a misdemeanor or while awaiting trial; *or*
- You are a member of the Attorney General's Address Confidentiality Program or are protected by a Domestic Violence Protective Order; *or*
- The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm, blizzard, or ice storm warning for your town/ ward for election day, and you have concerns about safely traveling in the storm."

**This list reflects the wisdom of the Legislature in years past. It recognizes the needs of individuals and their right to vote. Please don't undo all that good work.**

**Please recommend ITL on HB418.**

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***This is a letter from Jean Whitham, who lives at RiverWoods in Manchester's ward 12. She wrote it to thank the poll workers who made it possible for her to vote on Nov. 4.***

My husband and I want to express our deepest gratitude for the help we received in accomplishing our goal of voting, in person, at the Northwest Elementary School on Tuesday. Our thanks go to the plan of assistance for disabled and senior citizens (we did not know of it) and especially a kind man who led us, walking unsteadily with canes, into the gym.

We have been independent residents of RiverWoods Manchester for almost six years. We moved to this CCRC after living in a small "rural" Connecticut town, where we participated in volunteer activities for 43 years. As expected our physical ability has changed and so it now limits our lifestyle considerably. Accepting and adapting is a challenge. However we were determined to vote in person, not by absentee ballot.

During October we attended RWM Civics programs to hear candidates speak, studied many campaign flyers and remembered previous election visits to the school as easy walk-in events. We decided the quietest time would be at one thirty o'clock. It was a shock to arrive and observe how far the line of would be voters extended. What could we do? Standing so long was not possible. We cannot cast our votes! Very discouraged, we drove away to do another errand.

Back in the car we each knew we had to revisit the school. This time we made our way down the street which passes the school entrance at a slow crawl. An elderly lady gave us some encouragement and we drove into the school entrance parking area where spaces are marked Handicapped and there right in front of the walkway was an empty space! Now what? As we got out of the car a man came toward us and asked, "Do you need help? I can lead you inside." We were going to cast our votes!

As we walked outside with I VOTED stickers on our shirts people on the sidelines thanked us for voting. How I wanted to THANK THEM for their foresight in planning a way to make our experience a success!