



**Town of Wilton
Town Clerk
158 Weld Road
Wilton, ME 04294
207-645-4961**

March 1, 2021

Re: LD 208– An Act to Expand Access to Absentee Ballots
Position: Oppose

I am writing to share my concerns with the proposed changes to the Absentee Ballot request system. There are two parts that are of the utmost concern to our Office.

The first part is the Elimination of the three-day deadline to request an Absentee Ballot.

A. Current Absentee Ballot Special Circumstances Requirement

Currently there is a “Special Circumstances Requirement” (passed in 2011) that becomes effective at the close of Business on the Thursday before an election. It allows for citizens to still request an absentee ballot after filling out an application and specifically explaining why they are unable to make it to the polls on Election Day. (As a matter of reference Absentee Ballots are always available for Local, National and State Elections no less than thirty days prior to the Election.)

The intention of this timeframe is to allow Clerks to be certain that all absentee ballots are entered into the Central Voter Registration (CVR) System. The CVR System is used to create the Incoming Voter List on Election Day. The Incoming Voter List is used by Ballot Clerks at the Polling location to make certain that only Registered Maine Voters cast a ballot on Election Day. When returned Absentee Ballots are entered into the CVR System they reflect an AV next to the registered voter’s name. This is a signal to the Ballot Clerks that this Voter has already cast a ballot in this particular Election and is not eligible to cast a ballot on Election Day. The Incoming Voter List is usually created on the Monday evening prior to the Election so that the list is as up to date as possible. A copy of this list is available both inside and outside of the voting area during an election.

B. Specific to the Town of Wilton

The November Election most often coincides with the tax due date in the Town of Wilton. We are a small Office and have limited space in our Lobby; the influx of absentee voters on Friday and Monday that are requesting to vote in-person severely limits our ability to wait on townspeople who wish to conduct Town business in our Office. Under the current Covid Guidelines created by the Governor’s Office our lobby is limited to two persons in our lobby at a time. We have received via Facebook and in person several angry complaints about the “unnecessary wait time” for people not conducting Town business. In addition to the wait time staff are often preoccupied with voter’s absentee ballot questions that tie up our phone lines. The voters themselves often become disenfranchised from

waiting to cast their ballot around other Townspeople who are at the Town Office to conduct Town business. We have had our Code Enforcement Officer and Fire Chief inspect our upper floor and there is no area in which a temporary closed area could be created for voting without blocking a means of egress.

C. Processing Absentee Ballots

We are required to notify the Party Chairs of our intentioned times/dates for processing absentee ballots. We need to make the envelopes available to them for inspection prior to casting the ballots. In Wilton we start to process at 10:00 am after allowing the required one-hour inspection time. It is our firm intention to process all of our ballots before the close of the polls at 8 pm; however, because these ballots were received throughout the day they would need to be processed after the close of the polls at 8:00pm. This would increase the amount of time needed to count the ballots and relay results to the press/general Public.

The second part is to allow any voter to vote in the presence of the Clerk at any time until 8pm on Election Day.

When the Clerk is at the polls the ballots have to be with the Clerk at the Polling place. In our particular voting area, the person who is absentee balloting were doing so at the polls; would be standing within thirty feet of the ballot box. One must remember that there are several steps when an absentee ballot is cast by a voter

1. An envelope is created by the Clerk with the voter's name and address written in red and a ballot is issued with the envelope to the voter
2. The voter then votes the ballot and it must be placed in an envelope that is sealed by the voter. The voter also signs the back of envelope before returning the sealed ballot to the Clerk
3. The Clerk then records the time and date that the ballot was received on the back of the envelope and enters that information into the Central Voter System.
4. The ballot is then presented to a Ballot Clerk who will check off the voter's name on the Voter list as proof that the ballot was received to be cast on Election Day.
5. The ballot would then be opened and subsequently cast by a different Ballot Clerk.
6. The ballot would then be counted with all of the other ballots on Election Day.

The voter, even though they could be standing less than fifty feet from the voting booths and the ballot box would not cast their own ballot despite being "at the polls" on election day.

There are a lot of logistical questions that need to be addressed before there can be a clear interpretation of the application of this bill as currently presented.

If the clerk remains at the Town Office would they be required to keep a specific number of ballots on hand for absentee voters? Would the Town Office be required to remain staffed until 8pm when the polls closed? Would the Clerk be required to have a Police escort to consolidate the Town Office absentee ballots with the ballots at the polling place? Would voters be allowed to register to vote at the Town Office on election day even though they did not actually "go to the polls"?

Thank you for your time, should you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 645-4961 or clerk@wiltonmaine.org.