



TOWN OF DURHAM
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Date: March 4, 2021

To: Senator Louis J. Luchini, Senate Chair
Representative Chris Caiazzo, House Chair
And members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

From: Rebecca Taylor-Chase, Town Clerk
Town of Durham, ME

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

Oppose

I am writing to you in opposition to LD 208- An Act to Expand Access to Absentee Ballots. The administration of an election is a very complex task to accomplish under the best circumstances and 2020 added many new challenges.

For the July primary the 3-day period was eliminated and clerks had to figure how to issue absentee ballots up until 7:59 pm on election day all while completing the preparation for the polling day. This was also our first election during the pandemic and there were many new guidelines to implement in order to provide a safe voting arena. I felt I spent an unbelievable amount of time trying to enact a failsafe system that would allow a voter to vote absentee through election day and then we had just one person do that. I had to come in over the weekend because we were issuing ballots during days that are spent prepping for the election day. This put unnecessary stress on the staff and the town budget.

There are many tasks that can't be completed until the few days leading up to an election and clerks take advantage of this time to get fully prepared. Here are some examples of the tasks I am completing the afternoon before an election:

- Setting up the polling location
- Preparing the IVL (incoming voter list) binders
- Receiving into CVR returned ballots
- Entering voter registrations (new and changes)
- Printing signage for social distancing, traffic flow, voting instructions
- Generating absentee ballot reports for ballots not returned
- Preparing absentee log for ballots returned on election day
- Confirming all poll workers for election day

There are many small towns like the one I work in that the clerk's office is also the tax collector, issues vehicle registrations, building permits and completes many other tasks required to operate the town. This does not stop when an election is happening so there is already time pressure issues. Most of these towns do not have flexibility in their budget to bring in temporary help to assist with election tasks.

For me election day starts at 5:30 am and doesn't end until midnight which is the case for many other town clerks (some starting earlier and working later). It is vital that we get home at a reasonable time on the eve of the election to get rested so our minds are fresh for such an important day. With the elimination of the 3-day period we would be working late into the evening to get the final preparations done for polling day. This would cut into our preparedness for election day.

There is plenty of time and opportunity for a voter to obtain an absentee ballot. The electronic site is available 3 months prior to the election. Clerks can start receiving and processing written applications 3 months prior to the election. Ballots are available for in person absentee voting 30 days prior to the election and all previous requests are sent at that time. With the implementation of drop boxes in most towns there is convenience for the voter to return the ballot without having to account for transit time in the postal system. The 3 extra days is just not necessary for absentee balloting unless the voter has a special circumstance.

Each election is unique and requires our attention to detail. The Board of Elections does a great job in providing us with a vast amount of information to successfully execute an election. During the 3 days leading up to the election while completing the last minute details we are also reviewing the election completion instructions. The correct counting procedure and securing of the ballots is quite detailed and requires clerks to study the instructions as they are different with each unique election. Having to continue to issue absentee ballots during the time we are reviewing this material would again put undo stress on clerks to be prepared.

Issuing absentee ballots on polling day is a very difficult process. Our town office often closes on election day so staff can assist at the polls so voters still need to come to the poll to apply for the ballot. It required additional staff putting more strain on the budget and very carefully planned tracking by the clerk. We found that in July all but one person who showed up to vote absentee ended up coming inside to vote at the polls when they saw the safeguards in place and that there was not a huge crowd. The time I spent preparing for this procedure took away from my ability to prepare for the counting procedures at the end of the night leading into a longer process to have the results.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my thoughts on LD 208 from a clerk's perspective.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Taylor-Chase

Town Clerk

Town of Durham

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