

Senate Election Law and Municipal Affairs Committee

Jessica Bourque 271-2104

SB 214, enabling no-excuse absentee registration and voting.

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

Time Opened: 9:17 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:29 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Gray, Lang, Rochefort, Perkins Kwoka and Long

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill allows for no-excuse absentee registration and voting.

Sponsors:

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Rosenwald

Sen. Altschiller

Sen. Prentiss

Sen. Watters

Sen. Reardon

Sen. Long

Rep. Simpson

Rep. Wilhelm

Rep. Muirhead

Rep. Telerski

Who supports the bill: Andrew Harmon, Liz Tentarelli, Dave Nelson, Sarah Chouinard, David Trumble, Olivia Zink, Nancy Brennan, Mo Baxley, Tina Guilford

Who opposes the bill: No one

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Perkins Kwoka, Prime Sponsor

- This bill ensures that everyone in New Hampshire can vote in a way that accommodates whatever may prohibit them from doing so on election day.
- There are currently some categories related to absentee voting qualifications in statute that often cause confusion.
- This removes restrictions on absentee ballot qualifications.
- There were no issues during the pandemic when absentee ballot qualifications were broadened and requests were high.

Senator Gray said this bill has no constitutional amendment, which has been an issue in the past.

- Senator Perkins Kwoka said she is aware that there have been issues in the past relating to the New Hampshire Constitution and believes that the legislature can exercise their will if it chooses.

Senator Lang said the New Hampshire Constitution enumerates the cause for absentee ballots and asks how to circumvent that.

- Senator Perkin Kwoka said that she believes that constitutions are open to modern interpretation, and she would be open to bringing a constitutional amendment if she thought the votes were there.

Andrew Harmon, New Hampshire Disability Rights Center

- Appreciates the disability carveout, but disabilities aren't always immediately apparent.
- He knows someone who has had recent medical issues and works two jobs, both of which would make traveling to a polling location very difficult. This would be very helpful for them.

Liz Tentarelli, League of Women Voters of New Hampshire

- Voters should be able to vote absentee without having to review a list of qualifications and try to determine if they fit any of the categories or not.
- According to the Secretary of State, a broad interpretation of "disability" should be used.
- There is no party advantage if this were to be adopted.
- We did this successfully during the 2020 pandemic.

Sarah Chouinard, America Votes

- This bill expands voter access.
- Allows non-partisan access to voting, leading to higher voter participation.
- Absentee voting does not favor one party or the other.
- Local election officials are the ones who are in control throughout the process.

Olivia Zink, Open Democracy

- New Hampshire is one of 14 states still requiring an excuse to vote by absentee ballot.
- No excuse absentee voting has a history of bipartisan support.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, New Hampshire allowed anyone concerned about the virus to vote by absentee ballot. This led to record turnout with no issues.
- This is about meeting Granite Staters' needs, not convenience.
- There are many reasons someone might elect to vote by absentee ballot, allowing hardworking Granite Staters to perform their civic duties more reliably.
- Democracy thrives when people participate, and no excuse absentee voting benefits everyone.

- Our Constitution has two reasons for absentee ballots; Religious observation is not one of them, nor is weather, but we still allow both of those reasons as an allowable reason to vote absentee.
- Lawmakers have the right to expand constitutional rights.

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Date Hearing Report completed: March 7, 2025