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Letter to the Editor

Re: Proposed Absentee Ballot Changes

The proposed changes related to obtaining and returning absentee ballots are of grave concern to aging advocates. Older adults are the most consistent and engaged voting members of the community. But for many their desire to vote is already hampered by existing barriers such as health conditions, disabilities, lack of transportation, limited broadband service, and basic literacy skills. Voting via absentee ballot is their only viable option. The bills recently passed by the Legislature will limit options to obtain and return absentee ballots by requiring voters to apply for absentee ballot for every election instead of once a year, limit who can return completed ballots, and provides severe penalties for good Samaritans who help out a friend or neighbor by returning their ballot. Voters should have the freedom to choose a person they trust to return their absentee ballot, not have it dictated by government. Many older adults do not have access to the internet or have a computer making it very difficult for them to request a ballot. Lawmakers should be working with the aging and disability communities to remove the voting barriers that already exist, not make it even harder for adults in these communities to vote. Our democracy depends on everyone being able to participate in the voting process.

Melissa Ratcliff
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Area Agency on Aging Board Chair