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CT legislators pass universal absentee ballot, election worker protection bills out of committee

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Matt Blumenthal speaking at the Connecticut Legislative Office Building on March 13, 2026. He was holding a new briefing on bills that would protect election workers and allow universal absentee ballots.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @SENBLUMENTHAL ON X.COM

Connecticut legislators are taking up extensive election bills that would allow absentee voting for all and protect election sites, processes and workers.

The Government Administration and Elections Committee has passed House Bill 5001, HB 5533 and Senate Bill 463 out of committee, each with a 13-6 vote. The three bills are just a few of the bills proposed by the committee this session.

HB 5001 seeks to take away all restrictions on voting absentee. According to the Secretary of State, the only excuses to vote absentee are if the voter will be out of town, if sickness or disability (of them or their family) are preventing them from getting to their polling place, active service in the military, religious reasons or because the voter is working as an election official at a polling place other than their own.

HB 5001 would eliminate those restrictions and allow no-excuse absentee voting. It would allow 17-year-olds who will be 18 by election day to vote early or absentee, provide electronic ballot delivery for certain absentee voters and amend the retrieval requirements for absentee ballots, among other things.

The bill is a long time coming. In 2024, Connecticut voters passed an absentee ballot referendum overwhelmingly, allowing the state to amend the Constitution to allow no-excuse absentee ballots. This bill now puts that amendment into effect.

"It is vital that we pass this bill, this year, for this 2026 election," said co-chair of the elections committee Rep. Matt Blumenthal, D-Stamford, at a news briefing on the bills on March 13. "Not only because the people of Connecticut overwhelmingly demanded it in the 2024 referendum... but also because it is a vital protection for voters across this state."

HB 5533 and SB 436 are basically the same bill, each regarding the safety of elections and election workers. Legislators will often introduce similar bills in both chambers to help the legislation move along faster.

These bills prevent federal and state officials from using force against, searching, arresting or detaining an individual within 250 feet of an election site without a warrant. It also bans people from wearing masks or coverings obscuring their identity within 250 of an election site, unless the covering is for medical or religious purposes. No one can be forced to show identification within 250 feet of an election site, either, except if they need it to vote. The bill proposed criminal penalties for anyone who harasses an election worker or tampers with election equipment.

During the new briefing, Blumenthal criticized President Donald Trump's efforts to interfere with state elections.

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>
> **REP. MATT BLUMENTHAL**

"Our election and our democracy are under attack as never before," Blumenthal said. "The Trump administration has already engaged in actions and rhetoric that seriously threaten the integrity of our elections and the right of every voter to cast their ballot freely, fairly and without fear."

Blumenthal vowed that his committee would not allow raids or voter intimidation in Connecticut, which is why they are proposing these bills, among others.

"The right to vote is the right on which all other rights depend. Here in Connecticut, we will protect it," he said.

At the briefing, committee co-chair Sen. Mae Flexer, D-Mansfield, said that the bills come after almost a decade of work to make voting more accessible through early voting and universal absentee ballots.

Flexer said the federal government's efforts to intimidate voters and interfere with elections across the country is "terrifying."

"We know that the voters in Connecticut... want better," Flexer said. "They want to know that when they show up to vote — whether that's showing up to vote early, whether it's voting by absentee ballot or showing up on election day — they want to know that both their election is secure and that their physical safety is secure."

She reiterated that the U.S. Constitution explicitly says that states are in charge of their own elections, and that the federal government has very little say in elections.

Blumenthal also criticized the proposed SAVE Act, which is a bill that would require providing documentary proof of citizenship in order to vote through documents like a passport or a photo ID and birth certificate with matching names. Roughly half of Americans don't have passports; 11% don't have access to their birth certificates, and 69 million American women have gotten married, changed their last name and are now without matching IDs and birth certificates, Blumenthal said.

"[The bill] would perhaps be the most widespread disenfranchisement of American voters since the Civil Rights Movement," he said.

The bill is meant to stop non-citizens from voting, a problem that Blumenthal said is nearly nonexistent.

"The SAVE Act is the functional equivalent of shooting yourself in the face to try to pop a pimple," he said.

The bills are currently filed with the Legislative Commissioner's Office, who will check them for constitutionality and consistency with other laws. Then, they will go to the Office of Fiscal Analysis to determine the bills' cost and fiscal impact on the community before the bills get sent to the House and Senate chambers for a vote.



Person holding badges in the spirit of voting.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PEXELS.COM

UConn students lead effort in advocating for gun reform legislation

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Audrey Nichols has been lobbying for gun violence legislation for years. A survivor of the Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, she has found activism a way to heal from the trauma she experienced at a young age.

When Nichols arrived at the University of Connecticut, she wanted to continue that work and make gun violence prevention more accessible for students. So, she is growing the UConn chapter of Students Demand Action, a national organization that is committed to ending gun violence.

She started the club last semester and now is working with the organization and other advocacy groups to pass a gun violence prevention bill in Connecticut's legislative session that would hold gun manufacturers accountable for making easily modifiable pistols.

"It's nice to be able to advocate for something I believe so strongly in," Nichols said.

House Bill 5043, if passed, would prohibit the manufacture and sale of convertible pistols, where a part or attachment like a Glock switch could be easily added to the gun, causing an automatic repeating action of the trigger.



Members of UConn's Students Demand Action together at a meeting. HOTO COURTESY OF @UCONNSDA ON INSTAGRAM.

"These switches have been found in Hartford, in Bridgeport, New Haven, and they've been involved in shootings there," she said.

While the bill made it out of committee, they still have work to do to get it passed. She said herself, along with other club members, plan to make phone calls and write letters and emails to legislators.

In addition to working on the legislation, Nichols said Students Demand Action meetings are spent making ribbons to bring awareness to gun violence and sending care boxes to survivors. She leads the club as president with her friend and fellow Sandy Hook survivor Jacqueline Hegarty, who serves as vice president.

Nichols remembers the care boxes she received when she was seven.

"It's nice now that I've grown up to be able to maybe provide that support to other kids, other students, other survivors of gun violence," she said.

There are 15 to 20 members in the club currently, Nichols said, but she is hoping to expand the group as they continue to grow.

She said for students interested in learning more can refer to the organization's UConntact and email list for weekly newsletters. She emphasized that the club does not condemn firearms, but are an organization rooted in gun violence prevention.

Many club members submitted written testimony for the bill, but Nichols testified at the public hearing at the Capitol Building in Hartford on March 11.

She said her testimony was emotional as she recalled her memories on the day of the shooting. She said that many legislators and others in the room — even those opposed to the bill — approached her after her testimony and commended her speaking out.

> ***"I will never stop talking about how rewarding it is to be able to try and make a difference."***
>
> **AUDREY NICHOLS**

"I will never stop talking about how rewarding it is to be able to try and make a difference," Nichols said. "People get so wrapped up in national politics that sometimes they forget about state and local level politics as well, and those are super important."

Gun safety advocates and police chiefs testified in support, including the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association, who said that they have seen an increase in weapons modified with switches in recent years.

"Law enforcement is concerned that an increase in rounds fired by an individual increases the likelihood that a member of the public or an officer will be struck by one of those rounds," the association said in testimony.

Several opponents of the bill call the legislation an overreach that would ban sales of popular Glock firearms and other striker-fired pistols of similar design.

"It penalizes law abiding Connecticut permit holders for the actions of criminals who are already breaking federal law," Tom Burr, outreach team member of the CT Citizen Defense League, said in testimony. "What the state of Connecticut should be doing is enforcing the laws we have against illegal machine gun conversion, rather than banning the standard tool of self-defense for millions of Americans."

Despite the trauma Nichols faced, she found a passion for politics, government and advocacy for a variety of topics—especially gun violence.

"It has definitely 100% shaped what I want to do in the future," she said. "It's really nice when you walk into the Capitol and it feels like where I am meant to be."

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