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## **Malloy Pushes For Electoral Reform**

### **Governor Orders Review Of No-Excuse Absentee Voting System, Vote-By-Mail Ballots**

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Gov. Dannel P. Malloy wants to loosen the restrictions on absentee voting and open the vote-by-mail option to anyone registered to vote in Connecticut — a mechanism embraced by nearly half the states in the country, but one that has caught little traction in the Land of Steady Habits.

In his State of the State address last week, Malloy vowed to “make voting more accessible” and narrowed in on “one simple but powerful way” — an amendment to the state constitution that would allow voters to mail in their ballots before Election Day, and waive the requirements that absentee voters be sick, disabled or serving in the military.

“Our modern lives and busy schedules don’t always align with a 14-hour block of time for voting,” Malloy told legislators. “People who work hard and follow the rules should be able to express their most fundamental democratic right.”

That same day, Malloy issued an executive order commissioning a report from the Office of Policy and Management on the viability of a no-excuse absentee voting system for local, state and federal elections. Such a shift would require amending the state constitution. Article 6, Section 7 of Connecticut’s guiding document states voters can cast absentee ballots only if they are out of town on Election Day, or “because of sickness, or physical disability or because the tenets of their religion forbid secular activity.” A 1992 amendment allowed members of the military serving overseas and their families to cast absentee ballots.

Malloy and Secretary of the State Denise Merrill have proposed the idea before; in 2014, 53 percent of voters rejected a referendum on rolling back the absentee ballot requirements. Merrill called the referendum question’s language confusing and vague, and said last year she is still committed to making “it easier for eligible citizens to cast a vote.”

While three states — Oregon, Washington and Colorado — hold their elections exclusively by mail, Malloy is calling for a hybrid system similar to those in 19 states that allow voters to cast ballots at the booth, or by mailing in a ballot before Election Day.

Supporters of no-excuse absentee balloting say it makes the electoral process more flexible; requiring people to vote in person is antiquated, they say, and disproportionately affects those who work long hours.

“It’s not likely to have a huge, immediate impact in Connecticut, just as it hasn’t had a huge, immediate impact elsewhere,” said Paul Herrnson, a political science professor at UConn.

Malloy is calling for absentee ballots that would supplement, but not replace, voting booths. His executive order claims the system would “lower the burdens and costs for local registrars and election workers on Election Day,” but Scott McLean, political science professor at Quinnipiac University, said mail-in voting would only lower the costs of an election if the state abandoned in-person voting entirely.

“If you have a hybrid system and you’re not doing away with the precincts,” he said, “elections are going to cost more money.”

David Schleicher, a Yale Law School professor who specializes in election law, said making it easier for voters to cast ballots is just one factor that affects voter turnout. Another is social pressure, which a more widespread absentee ballot system would dilute. Seeing friends line up to vote, or colleagues sport “I Voted” stickers at work are among the strongest impetuses to cast a ballot, he said.

Broadening the absentee ballot system could impact voter decisions, Schleicher said, as where they vote affects how they vote. Although what that impact would be, Schleicher couldn’t say.

Malloy’s executive order calls for OPM to present its report by Sept. 30.