



Why Delaware needs no excuse absentee voting.

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. The LWV of Delaware bases its action on the LWVUS position.

Delaware law provides for absentee voting; however, specific restrictions limit voting by absentee ballot. Also, in most cases, the request must be notarized, which adds a cost to many voters that some would call a poll tax.

ALLOW NO EXCUSE ABSENTEE BALLOTS. Absentee ballots already allow voters with an excuse – like travel or sickness – to vote using a mail-in ballot. In many states a voter needs to send in a written request for a ballot and Delaware requires a notary to sign the form. A pending bill (HB47) would eliminate the notary requirement.

But why should voters need an excuse to cast an absentee ballot? A policy of “No Excuse Absentee Ballots” allows anybody to request an absentee ballot for any reason – to save time, avoid the lines, work around a busy work or childcare schedule, anything.

Thirty states already provide No Excuse Absentee Ballots to any voter that requests one, and in Oregon and Washington state, it’s the only way to vote. The downside to no-excuses absentee ballots is that voters don’t enjoy the “zone of privacy” of the ballot box. When voting at home it’s possible for spouses, relatives, and others to look over a voter’s shoulder while they vote and “make sure they do the right thing.” Voting too early before the election also makes it possible that voters do not have the full information that comes with a campaign.

Why must we vote on Tuesday? No good reason whatsoever.

How do you know Tuesday is the reason people don’t vote? It’s not the only reason, but it’s a big one. U.S. Census data has long indicated the #1 reason voters gave for not making it out to the polls was “too busy/couldn’t get time off to vote.” In 2010, 27% of nonvoters gave this answer. After the 2014 midterm elections, a staggering 69% of nonvoters didn’t cast a ballot because they were stuck at school or work, or were too busy, out of town, sick or forgot.¹

Where does the United States of America rank globally in voter turnout? The United States ranks 138th of 172 nations in voter turnout. 47.7% on average since 1945.

Who else votes at a higher turnout rate than us? Just about everybody. Some of the other nations that vote at a higher rate than the United States: Italy (92%), New Zealand (86%), Canada (82.6%), Greece (80.8%), Israel (73.8%), Costa Rica (68.1%), India (61.55%), Jamaica (58.6%), Mexico (48.1%)².

The LWV of Delaware supports these bills from the 149th Session:

HB 47 ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUESTS: Eliminates the requirement that requests for ballots be notarized.

HB 63 ABSENTEE VOTING: The first leg of a constitutional amendment that would eliminate from the Delaware Constitution restrictions on voting by absentee ballot. Provides that the General Assembly shall enact general laws providing the circumstances, rules, and procedures for absentee voting.

HB 79 AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS: Would update existing Motor Voter Program to adopt an automatic voter registration process. Currently, when Delawareans apply for, renew, or replace a driver’s license or identification card, they must choose to register to vote, update an existing registration, or decline registration. This bill would require eligible voters to “opt out” of having their information automatically shared with the Delaware Department of Elections for registration. Six states and the District of Columbia have enacted similar opt out policies. Also makes technical corrections to conform current law to the Delaware Legislative Drafting Manual.

The League works all year, every year, to empower all eligible voters to participate in our political system. Our work especially seeks to aid those from traditionally underrepresented or underserved communities, including first-time voters, non-college youth, new citizens, minorities, and low-income Americans. Hundreds of local volunteer teams work year-round to register, inform and mobilize hundreds of thousands of voters in the lead-up to Election Day. The League also serves millions of voters through VOTE411.org, our one-stop elections information hub.

¹ **Pew Research Center, November, 2014, “Little Enthusiasm, Familiar Divisions after the GOP’s Big Midterm Victory”.**

² **WhyTuesday.org.** Why Tuesday? is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization founded in 2005 to find solutions to increase voter turnout and participation in elections.