



**DENISE MERRILL**  
SECRETARY OF THE STATE  
CONNECTICUT

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For more information:  
Av Harris (860) 509-6255  
Cell (860) 463-5939

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## **SECRETARY MERRILL JOINS STATE REPRESENTATIVE NAFIS TO HIGHLIGHT NEW PERMANENT ABSENTEE BALLOT STATUS FOR DISABLED VOTERS**

SECRETARY OF THE STATE URGES DISABLED VOTERS AND CAREGIVERS TO  
CONTACT THEIR TOWN CLERK ABOUT HOW TO APPLY TO VOTE  
PERMANENTLY BY ABSENTEE BALLOT

**HARTFORD:** Secretary of the State Denise Merrill today joined State Representative Sandy Nafis (D-27) of Newington to highlight a new voting option for disabled voters in Connecticut. Enacted by the Connecticut General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Dannel P. Malloy last year, Public Act No. 12-57 establishes permanent absentee ballot voting status for Connecticut voters with disabilities. This new option became available for Connecticut voters with disabilities starting January 1, 2013 and permits those Connecticut voters with a note from a doctor certifying that they are chronically or permanently disabled, to vote by absentee ballot for all future elections. The permanent absentee ballot status is to be administered by Connecticut town clerks, who are required to automatically mail qualifying voters absentee ballots prior to every election, primary, or referendum. Clerks will also send permanent absentee voters a yearly letter confirming that the individual still desires to continue voting by absentee ballot, which the voter must confirm in order to remain in permanent absentee voting status.

“This is a very compassionate and common sense change to our absentee ballot laws to allow those who face true hardship leaving their homes to get to the polling place a very convenient option to vote privately and independently out of the comfort of their own home indefinitely,” said Secretary Merrill, Connecticut’s chief elections official. “This new law will make it far more convenient for disabled voters to cast absentee ballots without having to apply for that ballot prior to every election. I want to stress that we are not discouraging any disabled voter from going to the polling place to cast a ballot, and indeed every polling place in Connecticut must by law be accessible with assistance for

disabled voters, and the vote by phone system. This is just another very convenient voting option available for disabled voters and I commend the leadership of Representative Sandy Nafis, who first heard about this issue from a constituent and led the effort to pass it into law. Hopefully this new flexibility in absentee voting will result in more disabled voters exercising their right to vote.”

State Representative Sandy Nafis (D-27) of Newington first heard about the issue in 2006 from Dolores Carron, a constituent from Newington who had written a letter to the Hartford Courant about the difficulties facing disabled voters who try to get to the polls. After several attempts at passage, the bill passed the General Assembly in 2012 and was signed into law by Governor Dannel P. Malloy.

“I am very pleased that the bill I introduced is now law,” Rep. Nafis said. “This is a major step in making it easier for all disabled voters in our state to be able to cast their ballots. We truly recognize that each and every voter with a physical disability should be able to exercise his or her right to vote at a polling place that is accessible. I thank everyone who worked together to make this all happen.”

Joyce Mascena, Town Clerk of Glastonbury and President of the Connecticut Town Clerks Association, said, “The Town Clerks of Connecticut look forward to working with Secretary Merrill’s office to implement this new absentee ballot option for our disabled voters. Our disabled citizens are our friends, neighbors and family, and we as town clerks are committed to doing our part so that any disabled voter who wants to cast an absentee ballot can sign up for this permanent status.”

Gretchen Knauff, Assistant Director of the Connecticut State Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, said, “In addition to accessible polling places and voting systems, the permanent absentee ballot is another option to assist people with disabilities in accessing their right to vote. It makes it easier for voters with disabilities who cannot otherwise get to the polls, to exercise their fundamental right to vote and participate in democracy.”

Secretary Merrill encourages anyone interested in qualifying for permanent absentee ballot status to contact their local town clerk or visit the Secretary of the State’s website at [www.sots.ct.gov](http://www.sots.ct.gov) to find out more.