

P. O. Box 512
Montpelier, Vermont 05601
May 27, 2020

Senate Committee on Government Operations
in theory at the State House; in reality who knows
Montpelier (in theory) or who knows

Dear Committee:

Please alter 20-0989 to rescind in its entirety sec. 3 of the 2020 acts and resolves no. 92. Please return authority over the form and terms of elections to the general assembly.

That section was a poor idea to begin with because it undermines our democracy. Our elections are too important to allow two people uncontrolled authority to alter the elections in any manner in which they see fit. Now you want to give that authority to just one person. I didn't trust two people with that unlimited authority and I trust even less that one person will have that unlimited authority. The unlimited authority was granted by the word "including" at the end of (a).

I am also sharing my observations on the remote process. I find that the remote process has made it more difficult for me (and others like me) to participate in a meaningful manner. I hope that you have already recognized these problems and are working to resolve them.

I acknowledge that some people are praising the ability for people to listen on a stream. They fail to mention the darker side: reduced ability to participate meaningfully. There is a huge gap between observing and participating. Our democracy needs meaningful participation, and that has been diminished. Some specifics:

- People no long submit documents. Your agenda shows that five people testified on elections yesterday. An additional five testified on S.124. Yet the only documents on your site for yesterday are from BetsyAnn Wrask. I can no longer follow what is happening by reading the documents.
- I can no longer participate in committee hearings. I do not accept the terms and conditions of either Zoom or Google. (YouTube's terms and conditions are Google's.) The general assembly now requires participants in committee hearings to give personal information to those two companies. That is an improper trade-off.
- Topics on agendas can be obscure. Yours are easier to follow than many others. Your hearing yesterday was listed as COVID-19 Committee Discussion with a subheading of Elections. That is not obscure. Many other committees are obscure; when they list as COVID-19 committee discussion, they don't include a subheading.
- Committee schedules have little advance notice. Yours for example, has listings for committee discussion for tomorrow and the next day. It is really hard to prepare for a hearing or request to participate on the short notices given in schedules.

The remote process in the Senate also has reduced the ability for meaningful participation by people. Too many bills are handled irregularly by suspending the rules. Some of those issues:

- Texts of bills are not published in calendars.
- Too many bills are introduced and taken up without actually having appeared in a calendar.
- Too many bills are rushed through second reading, and third reading, and moved out, all in a few hours. That does not allow time for anyone watching to react or provide input. (It is hard to tell how long the Senate spends on its work because of a long-standing rule to not publish times in its journals. That is one rule whose suspension or revision would actually help. I have a feeling from times given in house journals that not much time is spent on most of the bills and that there is little debate.)

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Sincerely,
Thomas Weiss, citizen