

# *News From NJ Senate Democrats*



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## **SMITH-SWEENEY ABSENTEE BALLOT BILL SIGNED INTO LAW**

**TRENTON** - A bill sponsored by Senators Bob Smith and Stephen M. Sweeney which will allow New Jersey voters to vote by absentee ballot in a general election for any reason was signed into law today by Governor Codey.

"The democratic process is only successful when people are engaged in the voting process, but for many, the inconvenience of going to the polls, for whatever reason, keeps them away," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset. "Today's bill signing will allow the people of New Jersey to exercise their right to vote, regardless of whether they can make it to their voting location or not. Through greater access to absentee ballots, New Jerseyans will have an increased opportunity to be a part of the democratic process."

The bill, a Senate Committee substitute for S-1133, S-1435 and S-2397, will amend current law to allow any legally registered voter to vote by absentee ballot in a general election without providing a reason. The new law will also permit voters who want to vote by absentee ballot to automatically receive an application for an absentee ballot in every subsequent general election until the voter requests otherwise, and would provide safeguards, such as photo ID verification of election-board authorized absentee ballot messengers and a prohibition on candidates from serving as authorized messengers, to ensure that absentee ballots are not abused to illegally sway the results of an election.

Currently, absentee ballots are only provided to those voters who are disabled, ill or away from their homes on election day.

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"In southern New Jersey, polling places are not on every street corner, and a number of factors could come into play which would make it hard for people to get out and vote," said Senator Sweeney, D-Gloucester, Cumberland and Salem. "By increasing people's access to absentee ballots, we are saying that their right to select their representatives in local, State and federal government is more important than the inconveniences that keep them from getting to the polls. At the same time, we have provided the protections to ensure that unscrupulous candidates cannot abuse the absentee ballot privilege to turn democracy against itself."

The bill was approved by the Senate and the Assembly in June.

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