I have examined HF590 (2021) and I agree with the concerns brought up by the Iowa Sierra Club, which I have included with a few comments: This bill reduces window for casting absentee ballots, either by mail or in person, from 29 to 18 days. It had been 40 days as recently as four years ago. We should return to a 40-day window for absentee voting, instead of a shorter time.

This bill would prevent satellite voting stations, which some counties set up. Instead, an absentee voter could only vote at the auditor’s office prior to the election for only 18 days. Although 100 voters could petition for a satellite voting station, which puts the onus on the voter instead of a service offered by the auditors.

It is not clear how members of the military will be affected, but it appears that they will not be able to meet the shortened time-frames mandated by this bill.

Further, a longer time window for absentee voting will ensure that the absentee ballots will arrive in county auditors’ offices early, which can help in processing absentee ballots.

The bill prohibits county commissioners of elections from sending an absentee ballot application to a voter. It is really convenient for voters when absentee ballot applications are mailed to voters, especially since it is from a trusted official source.

Further, the bill reduces the window in which a person can request an absentee ballot from 120 days to 70 days. That is not necessary. The high turnout in the 2020 election shows that this is not needed.

This will encourage long lines at the polls, which will increase the amount of time it takes to vote. We should work on decreasing the size of lines and the length of time it takes to vote.

This bill prohibits county commissioners of elections from exercising home rule powers with respect to the administration of elections.

The bill allows the state commissioner of elections to issue guidance outside of the rulemaking process to clarify election laws/rules. The rulemaking process involves input from the public before the rules are implemented. This legislation removes input from the public.

Failure to implement the guidance is a felony leading to incarceration and fines, draconian sanctions even if the mistake is simple.

The bill makes failure to adequately perform voter list maintenance (AKA purging) an aggravated misdemeanor, leading to fines and incarceration. This has the potential to disenfranchise voters who are accidentally purged from the voter rolls.

The bill mandates only a single drop box for absentee ballots and mandates it to be located near the office of the county commissioner. It makes sense to have more than one drop box, at the discretion of the county auditors. Voting should be convenient.

Possibly worst of all, this bill sets fines of $10,000 for technical infractions of election laws – simple mistakes

This bill makes it illegal to fill in portions of an absentee ballot with information that the county auditor already has about the voter, including the voter’s address. There is no reason to deny county auditors the right to use their voter database to pre-fill absentee voter’s information.

This bill mandates that a postal barcode would determine when the voter mailed the ballot to the county auditor. Post marks would no longer be allowed to determine the date the voter mailed the ballot. That is unnecessary..

The bill prohibits a person who has been nominated by a political party from being nominated by a nonparty political organization for the same office in the same election. In other words, the loser of a primary would not be able to run as an independent.

This bill changes the number of signatures required to be received for the nomination of candidates for partisan office.

The bill changes the required convention or caucus size for nominees from nonparty political organizations, which would affect third party candidates.

The 2020 primary and general elections proved how convenient absentee voting is. The elections did not result in fraudulent voting. Unprecedented numbers of voters actually voted – 76% of Iowans. There is no question that the 2020 presidential race brought out large numbers of voters this year and that the aggressive promotion of absentee balloting also encouraged voters to participate. Instead of this bill, we should continue the policies that led to success in 2020 and expand the opportunities to vote absentee by lengthening the time voters can vote absentee, increasing satellite voting, and increasing the number of drop boxes.