



Re: Request for Urgent Action to Address Elections Administration Problems That Threaten the Integrity of the June 9th Primary

Dear Secretary of State Raffensperger and State Election Board members:

We write to you on behalf of voters, voting rights advocates, and community led organizations, who are committed to ensuring fair and equitable voting rights in Georgia. As part of our continuing dialog with you, we have identified three urgent elections administration actions that we believe are warranted to protect the integrity of the June 9th primary election: **(i) extend the deadline for receipt of mailed in absentee ballots, (ii) implement an enhanced communications strategy to adequately inform voters of the addition of absentee drop box locations and changes to in-person polling locations, and (iii) enforce uniform protocols related to the provision to and use of PPE by poll workers and voters throughout the state.**

The need for action is urgent, these issues are not complicated to address, and they are within your authority to resolve. Time is of the essence, and the risk that a significant number of Georgia voters may not be able to vote safely or may not have their votes counted, outweighs the burdens of the requested actions. Therefore, we urge you to take immediate action on three critical issues through uniform guidance and the necessary support to all county Boards of Elections, so that Georgians can successfully vote in our upcoming elections.

Rationale for the requested actions

- 1. Extend the absentee ballot deadline to include ballots postmarked by election day (June 9, 2020).**

Elections administration policies caused significant delays in processing absentee ballot requests. Everyone involved in elections was aware of the exponential increase in absentee ballots expected to be cast during the 2020 elections. The decision to contract with an out-of-state company far from Georgia (in Arizona) to issue ballots has meant an even longer turnaround time, and deficiencies in quality controls (e.g., incorrect

addresses, the use of a ballot “sleeve” rather than a privacy envelope) that have caused delays and confusion. Fulton County is also responsible for tens of thousands of absentee ballot requests being delayed due to a combination of factors, including technical glitches causing email absentee ballot requests to be lost, and the decision to delay processing email requests for up to a month. Other counties throughout the state have had delays affecting fewer voters, but no less significant to those voters potentially disenfranchised as a result. Despite efforts to correct these deficiencies, significant pockets of delay exist throughout the state and there is no guarantee that the shift to local processing this final week will be adequate to resolve the issue.

Voters are not responsible for ballot processing delays and must be given adequate time to submit their ballot. During this pandemic, both election processing and mail services have been affected by the increased sanitary requirements, staff shortages caused by illness, and the unique challenges of safe transportation. It is therefore unreasonable to expect voters to suffer through processing delays and errors only to find their ballots rejected because they cannot control the timeliness of mail delivery.

2. **Implement an enhanced communications strategy to address the addition of absentee drop box locations and changes to in-person polling locations.** This should include posting digital and alternative notices in every county to notify voters in the communities where they live. These changes are also necessary for the August runoff and November election.

Voters need updated information about drop box locations and polling place changes, not only online, but through physical means, including posting in public areas. Internet access is not widely available in all communities, and counties without notification standards and limited resources cannot successfully notify voters about critical changes. Posting changes discreetly online does not provide meaningful notification to voters. Standard notification must be provided both digitally and either by phone, text, email, physical mail, or public posting, so that voters may successfully access the ballot.

More accurate information readily available to voters from multiple reliable sources will ease the burden on overstretched counties to repeatedly provide basic “self-help” information to voters. Traditional patterns of communication have been affected by months of pandemic lockdown so using a variety of approaches to inform voters makes sense. Communication failure can put poll workers, voters, and the election process at risk if more voters need to vote in person, go to multiple polling locations, and/or engage in more in-person contacts to resolve their voting questions on election day.

IMPORTANT NOTE: In addition to enhanced communications, it is necessary that your office support the county boards of elections to address the need for reallocation of the required voting equipment and supplies based on updated numbers of expected election day voters at each of the polling places in the counties. This is especially important where there have been last-minute changes in the number and locations of polling locations from those assigned and familiar to voters from previous elections. This proactive approach toward providing adequate notice to the affected voters is advisable to avoid the appearance or practice of voter suppression by confusion and/or predictably long lines.

3. Enforce uniform protocols related to the provision to and use of PPE by poll workers and voters throughout the state. This requires posting uniform PPE standards at all polling locations, providing PPE in each county prior to election day, and providing for PPE supplies for voter use. The protocols should clarify the conditions under which non-partisan organizations and/or companies can provide free PPE to voters without the risk of sanctions.

Voters have reported differing sanitary standards within and between counties.

Machines and styluses were not sanitized each time a voter touched the voting machines and many poll workers did not uniformly wear or use PPE. Many counties noted they have not yet received PPE from the Secretary of State's office, while some poll workers have refused to use PPE because they have not been directed to do so.

Public health guidance dictates the use of PPE to reduce the spread of COVID-19. To protect the safety and health of poll workers and voters alike, PPE use should be required through standard enforced protocols at polling locations that are necessarily indoors and shared by large numbers of people. Such protocols should include direct communication with all of the counties and their election staff and poll workers; posting uniform guidance outside and inside polling locations; and inclusion of the guidance as part of the communications outreach strategy to voters.

Despite the challenges of these times, Georgia voters demand fair, equitable and efficient elections. Providing all active voters with absentee ballot applications and allowing counties to install ballot drop boxes have been a helpful start, but without the additional actions outlined in this letter, the integrity of the June 9th primary election is still at risk. Boards of elections and voters need the additional support of time, better information, and enforcement of uniform protocols to reduce the impediments to their absentee ballots being counted and to have safe in-person voting if that is what they choose to or must do.

We ask for your prompt attention and urgent action.

Sincerely,

ProGeorgia State Table
All Voting is Local, Georgia
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta
Black Voters Matter
Campaign Legal Center
Coalition for the People's Agenda
Common Cause
Georgia Association for Latino Elected Officials
Georgia Stand Up
The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law
League of Women Voters of Georgia
NAACP-GA
The New Georgia Project
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund