



Dear Palm Beach County Commissioners,

We write to urge you to fully fund the Palm Beach Supervisor of Elections' budget request for 2021/22. Running secure elections requires secure funding, and it's critical that voters are provided with the services and resources they need to access the ballot.

The 2020 election came with record absentee voting, historic statewide voter turnout, and unique challenges. What it didn't come with was a proportionate increase in state funding to offset necessary costs that have fallen on the Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections. Furthermore, additional financial burdens are on the horizon, due to decisions made during the 2021 state legislative session. We fear that if the Supervisor's budget request is not approved, these unfunded requirements will jeopardize the security and accessibility of Palm Beach elections, and hamper the ability of the Supervisor to fulfill her duty to the citizens of Palm Beach.

For example, the passage of Senate Bill 90 created new ID requirements for vote-by-mail ballot requests. In addition, it requires that the Supervisor of Elections be able to confirm that ID. The form of that identification can either be a Florida Drivers' license, a Florida state ID card number, or the last four digits of a voter's social security number. However, Supervisors do not always have all three of these forms of ID available as data points to confirm the identity of every voter. To be able to confirm each type of ID, the Supervisor will have to spend money and time to ensure voters are informed if they are unable to match the voter with the ID submitted and additional information is needed. As the volume of requests is bound to increase, it is essential that the Supervisor has the necessary funding to be able to contact these voters.

Comprehensive voter education efforts are very important to make sure that voters are aware of these new identification requirements for vote-by-mail requests and changes to their voter registration information. To avoid problems, these efforts need to be done before ballots are requested. There are also new limits as to who can assist voters by turning in their vote-by-mail ballots. Notifying voters of these changes and restrictions will also fall upon the Supervisor of Elections, who will need to have the resources to prepare voters for the changes in the law.

Lastly, we fear that the restrictions placed upon dropboxes in SB 90 could also lead to access issues without proper funding. Dropboxes for vote-by-mail ballots were exceedingly popular last

election cycle, including drop box locations which were open 24 hours a day.¹ In a survey by the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections in March, the Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections reported that 118,100 vote-by-mail ballots (nearly a third of all vote-by-mail ballots returned) were submitted by voters in drop boxes. Unfortunately, SB90 has restricted the ability of the Supervisor to offer drop boxes beyond early voting hours except at their offices, while simultaneously requiring that the drop boxes must be staffed without allocating additional funds to do this. This means that to meet the demand for ballot deposits, increased staffing and extended early voting hours on high traffic days may be required. All of these changes will come with additional costs.

We know that where funding for elections is scarce and doesn't meet voters' basic requirements, private money sometimes fills the gap. However, the legislature also prohibited SOEs and others from accepting private funding for elections. SOEs in Palm Beach and many other counties, as well as the Secretary of State, used private funds last election cycle for personal protective equipment, additional drop boxes, mailings, equipment, poll workers, voter education, and many other expenses that enabled them to conduct a safe election. There is no viable alternative to adequately funding the upcoming elections other than approving this budget request.

Palm Beach County has important elections coming up fast. Early voting for Florida's 20th Congressional District special election begins on Oct 23rd. The budget we ask you to approve also provides funds through the 2022 primary election next August. For all of the reasons above, we urge you to quickly disperse all election funds that the Supervisor of Election has requested.

Sincerely,

Brad Ashwell
Florida State Director, All Voting Is Local

Mark Schneider,
President, Palm Beach Chapter of the ACLU of Florida

¹ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/election/article246586853.html>