

SENATE DEMOCRATIC ELECTION PROTECTION WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

North Carolina is currently under a statewide Stay at Home order due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Voting in the 2020 Election will begin in about six months and absentee ballots will begin to go out in three months. Given the unpredictability of the virus and the probability of a resurgence in the Fall, the Senate Democratic Election Protection Working Group proposes a series of common-sense solutions to ensure the integrity of the election. Our recommendations protect and allow safe, in-person voting and expand and improve absentee voting options. These recommendations are made in consultation with the North Carolina State Board of Election, the Brennan Center for Justice, Democracy North Carolina, Southern Coalition of Social Justice, and Forward Justice.

I. APPROPRIATE STATE FUNDS TO SECURE THE ELECTION

- A. Appropriate state matching funds under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and the CARES Act. The 20 percent matching funds would allow North Carolina to better meet our 2020 Election needs by drawing down \$22.5 million in federal election security funds.
- B. Appropriate funds to cover the costs county and state boards of election will incur as a result of the pandemic and necessary changes.
- C. Appropriate funds to educate the public and train election employees about changes put in place for 2020 Election.

II. KEEP OUR POLLING PLACES OPEN AND SAFE

- A. Ensure an adequate number of poll workers by:
 - i) eliminating requirement that a majority reside in the precinct where they work,
 - ii) expanding student poll worker program to allow students who are at least 16 years old to serve,
 - iii) using temporary staffing agencies to recruit workers where necessary,
 - iv) offering incentive compensation for poll workers above current \$7.25 hourly wage,
 - v) paying overtime to poll workers given that they are required to work 14 hours without a break; and
 - vi) ensuring that poll workers' unemployment benefits are not affected by their service.

- B. Establish healthy polling places by providing soap, water, and drying materials and alcohol-based hand sanitizers. May need to provide professional cleaning services to ensure adequate cleaning.
- C. Establish more efficient curbside or drive-thru voting options for those who have disabilities, are ill, are in a high-risk category or otherwise cannot leave their vehicle to vote.
- D. Grant temporary flexibility to current one-stop requirements regarding site and hour requirements given the uncertainty regarding containment of the pandemic. Allow sites to remain open longer if necessary due to COVID-19-related issues without impacting operation of other sites.
- E. Designate Election Day as a State holiday to expand the pool of potential polling locations and low-risk poll workers.

III. EXPAND AND IMPROVE ABSENTEE BALLOT OPTIONS

- A. Offer multiple methods of requesting mail-in ballots, including email, in-person, by phone, and by mail. Establish online portal for absentee ballot requests.
- B. Offer signature verification as an alternative to current requirement that absentee ballots be signed by two witnesses or a notary public. Ensure integrity of signature matching mechanism and process by which signature mismatches and disputed ballots are checked and verified.
- C. Allow copy of HAVA document for absentee request form in event voter does not provide driver's license or social security number
- D. Provide prepaid postage for returned absentee ballots to increase ballot security and reduce need to leave home.
- E. Extend number of days to count mail-in ballots to accommodate the anticipated surge in absentee ballots.
- F. Temporarily amend restrictions on senior and other care facilities to allow facility employees to assist voters in completing absentee ballots and thereby avoid requirement that outside bipartisan assistance teams enter the facility. May require one or more workers per facility to be trained and certified voter assistants.

IV. GRANT BOARD OF ELECTIONS TEMPORARY AUTHORITY TO ACT QUICKLY AND REMOTELY

- A. Temporarily suspend purchase and contract requirements for elections-related supplies and other items so that we can be ready in time for the 2020 election.
- B. Clarify authorization for telephonic and other remote meetings under open meetings law during the state of emergency.