



PO BOX 8453, COLUMBIA, SC, 29202, (803) 636-0431, WWW.LWVSC.ORG

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Henry McMaster
State House
1100 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Honorable Harvey Peeler, Jr.
President
S. C. Senate
P.O. Box 142
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

Honorable Jay Lucas
Speaker
S. C. House of Representatives
P.O. Box 11867
Columbia, SC 29202

Dear Governor McMaster, Senator Peeler and Speaker Lucas:

We write to urge you to enact meaningful protections for voters during South Carolina's 2020 elections. Experts have consistently said that the COVID-19 pandemic will not be over until a vaccine is available, certainly no sooner than 2021. All agree that successive waves of infection are possible. Until the disease is conquered, the state's citizens must not be required to gather together in crowded polling places on election days, risking their personal health and potentially spreading contagion throughout their communities. Election personnel must be able to carry out their work without danger of personal harm. We appreciate that the General Assembly has appropriated additional funds for election protection, but this addresses only some aspects of the problems raised by the disease.

The Director of the State Election Commission (SEC) and the Executive Committee of the South Carolina Association of Registration and Election Officials (SCARE) have written to you strongly encouraging measures that would reduce crowding at the polls. We fully support them in their reasoned and unbiased assessments. SCARE specifically cites multiple reasons that they support voting by mail (VBM) as the safest method for election workers, voters, facility owners, and indeed whole communities. The League of Women Voters agrees. We acknowledge the need for careful attention to VBM security issues, but SCARE leaders have substantial experience and believe that they are up to that challenge.

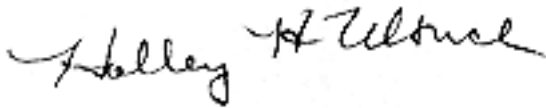
However, both SEC and SCARE note that there are other measures that would be very helpful if VBM cannot be fully implemented throughout South Carolina in 2020. No excuse early voting and expanded absentee voting are among them.

We also encourage your attention to absentee vote counting and reporting. S.867 passed the Senate before the COVID-19 danger was understood and would permanently add an extra day for absentee vote counts. Given the elevated numbers of absentee votes that can be expected in 2020 as a consequence of COVID-19, this extra time has become even more important, and should be expanded even further to meet the exceptional demands that can be expected in 2020. Another concern is the time allowed before certifying elections. South Carolina law currently requires certification within three days of an election. Extending this time period (preferably permanently) would be appropriate and would allow SEC and others to conduct audits under less pressure.

Finally, there have been suggestions that elections simply be postponed, in particular the June statewide primary elections. We do not believe that postponement is essential as long as safer procedures are in place, unless limited delay is needed to put revised election processes into place.

We understand that this difficult time presents many challenges for our state government and that you are engaged in fighting the dangers of COVID-19 on many fronts. We deeply appreciate that effort. However, we believe that election safety is among the most important of the issues facing our state in this pandemic and that corrective measures deserve immediate attention so that those responsible for conducting our elections can move forward energetically and safely to protect our right to vote.

Sincerely yours,



Holley Ulbrich, Co-President, League of Women Voters of South Carolina

holleyulbrich@gmail.com 864 508-4851



Christe McCoy, Co-President, League of Women Voters of South Carolina

christemcl@msn.com 609 213-1971