

South Carolina

August 3, 2020

The Honorable Harvey Peeler, Jr.
President of the Senate
SC Senate
Post Office Box 142
Columbia, SC 29202

Honorable Jay Lucas
Speaker of the House
SC House of Representatives
Post Office Box 11867
Columbia, SC 29202

Dear President Peeler and Speaker Lucas:

On behalf of AARP South Carolina's 610,00 members and all older South Carolina residents, we appreciate the dedication with which our state's leaders have responded to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the ongoing efforts that will be required as we move forward. As you consider the next steps to address the various facets of this public health emergency, we urge you to continue to be especially mindful of older adults, who are most at risk from this disease.

Time to Take Action Now to Make November Election Safe and Secure

South Carolina voters are set to go to the polls on November 3, 2020, for the general election. AARP believes that it's important to take action now to ensure that all registered voters can safely cast their ballots. For nearly 40 years, the turnout of voters over the age of 45 has significantly outpaced that of younger Americans. According to the United States Census Bureau, data for the 2016 presidential election, 71 percent of Americans over the age of 65 voted. That is compared with just 46 percent of 18-29 year-olds. Moreover, people over the age of 65 show up to the polls far more than any other age group.

However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that people over 65 years of age and those with serious health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and lung disease seem to be at the highest risk for severe disease and even death from COVID-19 related illness.

AARP SC Supports SC Election Commission Recommendations for Safe and Secure Election

Therefore, AARP South Carolina, a non-partisan organization, supports recommendations outlined in a July 17, 2020, letter from Marci Andino, executive director of the South Carolina Election Commission (SCEC) that would enable the state to safely and securely conduct the 2020 General Election during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Reinstating the "state of emergency" reason allowing every voter the option to vote absentee.
- Allowing voters to apply for an absentee ballot online.
- Removing the witness requirement for absentee return envelopes. The SCEC has already announced that it will provide postage-paid envelopes for voters to return their ballots, a decision AARP SC applauds.
- Allowing the use of drop boxes for the return of absentee ballots.

- Provide election officials with more time to process absentee-by-mail ballots or extend the date in which counties must certify the results of the election.
- Allow curbside voting to take place at designated locations.

These are challenging times for all South Carolinians. We must make unprecedented measures to ensure that every eligible voter can safely exercise their right to vote in the November 3, 2020, election without the fear of contracting COVID-19. Older South Carolina residents should not fear a risk to their lives or to their health to vote. No one should.

Planning Needs to Start Now

Now is the time to begin planning to have in place for November's general election the same protections that were afforded voters during the June primary. There is no harm in putting in place a framework now for conducting as much of the November election by absentee-by-mail as possible. However, any delays would be detrimental to the state's ability to protect voters, election officials and precinct workers who staff polling locations, many of whom are over the age of 65, while dealing with the volume of votes we would expect both through the mail and at the polls.

As the Palmetto state's residents look toward our elected officials for leadership, AARP SC is eager in working with you, other state leaders and elections officials to ensure that the largest voting bloc in our population, the 50+ voter, can continue to have a safe and secure opportunity to exercise their right to vote during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

Teresa Arnold
AARP SC State Director

cc: Governor Henry McMaster
Members of the Senate
Members of the House of Representatives
Marci Andino, SC Election Commission
John Wells, Chairman, SC Election Commission