

| **DALLAS COUNTY** |

Abbott's Limits on Drop-off Locations for Mail-In Ballots Won't Affect Dallas County Directly

JACOB VAUGHN | OCTOBER 5, 2020

If you live in Travis or Harris counties, thanks to the governor, you might have to venture a lot farther to drop off your mail-in ballots for the upcoming election. By proclamation, Gov. Greg Abbott limited mail-in ballot drop-off locations to just one per county and is allowing parties to place poll watchers inside to keep an eye on the operation.

“As we work to preserve Texans’ ability to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic, we must take extra care to strengthen ballot security protocols throughout the state,” Abbott said in a statement. “These enhanced security protocols will ensure greater transparency and will help stop attempts at illegal voting.”

Judge Clay Jenkins said in a statement that Dallas County won’t be affected, as having one drop-off location for mail-in ballots is standard here. The same can be said for Tarrant and Denton counties. However, he said poll watchers may put election staff at greater risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

“This has President Trump written all over it with the governor changing the rules with 33 days until the most important elections of our lifetime to make it harder to vote,” Jenkins said. “Dallas County will do what we can to protect the right to vote as well as protect the voters and workers involved in that process.”

Julio Román, a Dallas resident, spent some of his Saturday passing out nearly a hundred voter registration cards to people in the city. He said he feels Abbott’s proclamation is just a ploy to suppress the vote.



The governor is making it even harder for some Texans to vote. Joe Raedle/Getty Images

Román is with **Dallas Area Interfaith**, a grassroots coalition focused on improving communities in the DFW area. Throughout the pandemic, the group has been helping immigrant communities pay their rent, conducting food drives and encouraging people to vote.

He said he thinks the proclamation will disproportionately affect the working class, as well as minority populations who live far away from their county's only drop-off location.

This is why Jenkins said that it is imperative people make plans to vote. "Decide where, when, and how you will cast your ballot," he said.

But some are doing more than planning. In fact, two voting rights group and two individual voters are suing the governor over his proclamation.

Grace Chimene, president of the League of Women Voters of Texas, called Abbott's move "voter suppression, plain and simple." She said in a statement that the state should be expanding its safe voting options instead of putting up extra barriers.

Harris County, which is one of the most populated in the U.S., will be losing 11 of its drop-off locations for mail-in ballots, which were spread across 1,700 square miles.

Roberto Vera Jr., general counsel for the League of United Latin American Citizens, which is also named in the suit, said the governor's move would be fitting for a country like Russia or China, but not the U.S.

"Governor Abbott's executive order to limit drop-box locations reeks of the continued voter suppression and rigging of voter turnout by Republicans against all Texans in a pandemic," Vera said in a statement.

The American Civil Liberties Union also weighed in. Sarah Labowitz, policy and advocacy director for the ACLU of Texas, said in a statement that Texas has a well-documented voter suppression problem, not a ballot security problem.

Shenita Cleveland, a community organizer in Dallas, said this is all a means of maintaining the status quo by any means necessary. "This is more than suppression," Cleveland said. "It's pure hatred."

While Dallasites won't be directly affected, Texas operates on a winner-take-all system for the electoral college, so every vote counts, Román said. Because of this, he said, Abbott's proclamation could have a significant impact.

"If you have that mom that is taking care of her children doing online learning at home, and she doesn't have the opportunity to drive to the one drop-off location in the county, it could definitely make a difference," he said.