July 31, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.

Governor of Maryland



Dear Governor Hogan,

The League of Women Voters of Baltimore City supports a hybrid vote-by-mail election in November that includes adequate number of in-person voting centers. This is consistent with the proposal the Maryland Association of Election Officials sent to you on June 26, 2020. We think that a hybrid November election is the only practical solution to voting that will ensure the safety of both voters and election judges, many of whom are at high risk of contracting Covid-19.

We think sending a vote-by-mail application to all voters requiring them to request a ballot will create confusion among voters and strain the capacity of election boards to process vote-by-mail ballot requests. The cost of processing vote-by-mail ballot applications in addition would subject voters to an unnecessary extra interaction with a bureaucratic process which would predictably suppress voter turnout, regardless of the intent. Requiring that all polling locations be open during a pandemic complicates the task of securing sufficient polling places, finding sufficient election judges, and providing enough personal protective equipment. A hybrid vote-by-mail election minimizes these concerns.

Maryland, including Baltimore City has two prior experiences with vote-by-mail: the special election for the 7th Congressional District on April 28, 2020, and the presidential primary election on June 2, 2020. Both of these elections resulted in a record number of votes cast by Maryland voters. Indeed, we are hearing from many voters that they now prefer voting by mail, having experienced it.

While some problems emerged from these elections, these can be addressed in ways that are cost effective and will minimize the confusion that is likely to result from holding a traditional election. The primary revealed that more than six voting centers and additional ballot drop boxes are needed in Baltimore City. The number of both voting centers and drop boxes should be expanded. In addition, voting centers should be available for early voting, and all voting centers should be well equipped to protect election judges and voters from coronavirus contagion. Finally, the problem of undeliverable ballots can be addressed by sending postcards before mailing ballots to test deliverability.

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The State Board of Elections June 18 meeting showed that the Board is clearly addressing these and other problems from the June 2 primary, such as the date and printing errors. We appreciate the Board’s efforts to make sure everyone can vote during this unique situation and view the June 2 Baltimore City turnout as a great success and one worth building on.

We urge you to adopt a hybrid vote-by-mail election in November, with ballots (rather than vote-by-mail applications) sent to all registered voters and adequate voting centers. This is what the state and local boards of election are asking, and it is what will best serve Maryland voters. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely yours,

Flo Valentine and Nancy Lawler, Co-Presidents

CC:

Baltimore City Delegation

Local Officials

Baltimore City Board of Elections

Etc.