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**To:** Select Committee on 2020 Emergency Election Support, Bradford Cook, Chairman  
**From:** [Olivia Zink](#), Executive Director, Open Democracy Action, 603-621-8621  
**Date:** April 30, 2020  
**Subject:** Requests for Consideration by the Committee

Chairman Cook and Members of the 2020 Emergency Election Committee:

The Covid-19 crisis has exposed several weaknesses in New Hampshire's electoral system. We have had to bend restrictive rules to allow citizens to vote. With closed clerk's offices, our in-person voter registration requirements haven't been able to function --violating our NH Constitution P1, A11 guaranteeing accessible registration. Excuses for "physical disability" have also been stretched to accommodate a Covid-19 mail-in registration.

We fear that without of a comprehensive plan to address safe voting for pending municipal elections, the Sept. 8 state primary, and the Nov. 3 general elections, people will risk their health to vote in person, and many may not vote at all, essentially disenfranchising tens of thousands of voters of all parties. This comprehensive plan and funding priorities are needed before beginning a discussion on how NH spends federal funds should be spent. Contained in that comprehensive plan should be:

#### **For Cities and Towns -**

- Guidance for preparing in-person polling places. Protection for poll workers and voters, physical distancing guidelines, facility readiness, additional equipment needed, ballot logistics, any polling place rules changes (shared pens, distance between polling stations and other logistics).
- Local cities and towns will bear the heaviest burden of protecting voters and workers from Covid-19 this fall, therefore grants to cities and towns need to be considered.
- Recruitment of poll workers who are not in vulnerable populations
- Clear and simple rules for voters choosing to vote absentee using the "physical disability" excuse, and those who need to register to vote or change a registration. All this information on a dedicated website for NH elections.
- Dissemination of this information to town clerks, moderators and supervisors of the checklist. Open Democracy Action is briefing its members weekly via Zoom meetings. Weekly briefings by the Secretary of State's offices can and should be done.

(continued)

- Elimination of red tape needed to register to vote or obtain absentee ballot to streamline the process for both clerks and voters.
- That streamlining should include a no-excuse absentee ballot, eliminating the “physical disability” to which an otherwise healthy voter would need to swear to on penalty of law.
- Local cities and towns will bear the heaviest burden of protecting voters and workers from Covid-19 this fall, therefore grants to cities and towns need to be considered.
- Consider implementing an online voter registration system, used by 40 other states around the country

#### **For Voters -**

- Clear and simple rules for voters on the use of absentee ballots for those who fear Covid 19, including an SOS-written Covid 19 instruction sheet to be sent with each application & ballot
- Clear and simple rules for registering by mail using the physical disability excuse
- Education of **all citizens** through a robust public information campaign, so that all voters know how to register to vote, request a ballot, and fill out an return the ballot
- A “hot-line” to answer voter questions about the absentee ballot questions, safety of polling places and other unforeseen voting questions caused by the confusion.
- Post-paid ballot return envelopes to assist voters financially strapped by the crisis
- We also must make the absentee ballot request and voter registration available to submit with an editable PDF submitted to an email inbox in addition to the current fax and mail options.

Taking these proactive steps will go a long way in protecting the integrity of our electoral system and maximizing voter participation under these challenging conditions.

We call on you to expand this committee to include more age diversity, racial diversity and someone with current city/town clerk, moderator or other extensive, modern election-day experience. In addition, someone representing the disability community should be included.

We recommend these resources from the nonpartisan Brennan Center to guide you in what other states are doing, and their recommendations for both in-person and absentee vote-by-mail best practices. The Brennan Center would be happy to assist the State in any way it can.

How NH Compares with Other States in Preparedness

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/how-protect-2020-vote-coronavirus>

Steps NH Can Take to Prepare and Conduct Elections Under Pandemic Conditions

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/preparing-election-under-pandemic-conditions>

We at Open Democracy Action stand by to assist in any way we can. We welcome the opportunity to speak with the Select Committee and will mobilize our members around the Granite State to help spread the word when guidance is prepared.

Respectfully Submitted, Open Democracy Action, Concord, NH