

“Social justice should be the underlying goal of all humanity.”

-Alan V. Lowenstein, Institute Founder



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do social justice.

March 18, 2020

Dear Governor Murphy, Senate President Sweeney, and Assembly Speaker Coughlin:

We write to urge you to immediately pass and sign legislation to mail every registered voter a vote-by-mail application and provide prepaid postage for vote-by-mail applications and ballots. In light of the increasing COVID-19 crisis, it is crucial to assure the people of New Jersey that our democracy is functioning and accessible to all of our voters.

While other states are grappling with adopting vote-by-mail during the ongoing public health crisis, we are fortunate that New Jersey has been ahead of the curve. Under your collective leadership, vote-by-mail became law and was expanded.

It is now time to go further. There is a special election in Atlantic City on March 31st and there are upcoming School Board and Municipal elections in April and May, respectively. As we encourage people around New Jersey to stay home and observe social distancing, it is imperative that they have the option to participate in these critical elections while adhering to public health guidance. County clerks, heeding this advice, have already begun recommending that voters opt to vote-by-mail.¹

While vote-by-mail is convenient and accessible to many, it is also an economic burden to others. The cost of postage can deter low income individuals from participating in an election. In New Jersey, because we have one of the highest racial wealth gaps in the country, this population is disproportionately Black and Latino. In addition, nearly 83,000² people on parole and probation have their right to vote restored as of March 17, 2020. Many of these people are economically insecure.³ Under your leadership, we restored their right to vote. They join thousands of voters around New Jersey, including those in jail pre-trial or incarcerated for disorderly or juvenile offenses, who have the right to vote but may not be able to afford the price of postage. We must not create an additional barrier for them.

Fortunately, there is a simple solution. We urge you to immediately pass and sign legislation to 1) mail every registered voter a vote-by-mail application

and 2) provide prepaid postage for all vote-by-mail applications and ballots. There are currently pending bills in the Legislature that could accomplish some of this. A943 requires the outer envelopes of vote-by-mail ballots to include prepaid postage and S906 requires all vote-by-mail ballot applications to include prepaid postage. We urge you to pass and sign these bills or a new combined bill, as well as a bill requiring every registered voter not already scheduled to receive a vote-by-mail ballot to be mailed a vote-by-mail application immediately.

We understand that there will be a cost associated with this process. However, we are in extraordinary times right now. In such times, it is imperative that our democracy not just survive, but thrive.

Respectfully,

All of Us or None – Northern NJ
American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey
ATNJ Education Fund
Forcing Out Recidivism Through Education (F.O.R.T.E) House
Our Revolution Essex County
League of Women Voters of New Jersey
NeighborCorps Re-Entry Services
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
New Jersey State Conference of NAACP
Salvation and Social Justice
SOMA Action

cc: The Honorable Tahesha Way, New Jersey Secretary of State
Sen. Brian P. Stack
Asm. Robert J. Karabinchak

¹ Sources: *Clerks Leaning Toward All-VBM Elections in Covid-19 Crisis Year*, INSIDER NJ (March 16, 2020), <https://www.insidernj.com/sources-clerks-leaning-toward-vbm-elections-covid-19-crisis-year/>; Avalon Zoppo, *Register to vote by mail in N.J. due to coronavirus concerns at polls, county clerks say*, NJ.COM (March 11, 2020), <https://www.nj.com/coronavirus/2020/03/register-to-vote-by-mail-in-nj-due-to-coronavirus-concerns-county-clerks-say.html>.

² RYAN P. HAYGOOD ET AL., N.J. INST. FOR SOC. JUSTICE, *VALUE TO THE SOUL: PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS ON THE POWER OF THE VOTE* 3 n.24 (2019), https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/njisj/pages/1360/attachments/original/1570569487/Value_to_the_Soul_10-08-19_FIN_WEB.pdf?1570569487.

³ ALEXI JONES, PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE, *CORRECTION CONTROL 2018: INCARCERATION AND SUPERVISION BY STATE* (2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2018.html> (“People under community supervision have significantly higher rates of poverty[.]”).