



April 27, 2020

Dear Governor Murphy, Sen. President Sweeney, Speaker Coughlin, and Secretary of State Way:

Thank you for your leadership during this difficult time. We are fortunate that many of New Jersey's voting practices, such as no excuse absentee voting, have made it easier to ready ourselves for successful elections during this public health crisis. In addition, other recently enacted reforms have moved New Jersey toward more modern and secure elections, enabling us to take advantage of several tools to help better serve New Jersey voters.

As we address our elections, it is paramount to prioritize health and safety, while also ensuring a thriving participatory democracy. Voting must be categorized as an "essential service" and voters must have multiple options for accessing the ballot during this crisis.

We are most concerned with vulnerable communities, such as communities of color and the disability community, that historically face obstacles to the ballot.

Please find below recommendations to safeguard against disenfranchisement of voters, without posing undue risks to public health and safety.

These recommendations apply to the July primary election, with the possibility of application to the November General Election, and any special election between July and November.

### **Voter Registration:**

We face several challenges to voter registration. Traditionally, many voters rely on in-person registration opportunities through social service agencies, government interactions, voter registration drives, libraries, etc, or they rely on the automatic voter registration process through interactions with the Motor Vehicle Commission. These are not currently viable options, and many voters do not have the ability to print and mail paper voter registration forms.

- While we understand it will be difficult to have **online voter registration** available in time for the July primary election, we must dedicate additional resources to having the system ready as soon as possible.
- There must be expanded opportunities for people to register to vote, including **relaxing voter registration deadlines and permitting Election Day voter registration.**



- The “My Voter Information” section of the NJ Division of Elections website should be updated to provide more detailed information about a voter’s registration, including a full street address. Voters need this information to ensure their voter registration information is up to date

### **Polling Place Recommendations:**

We must encourage people who can vote by mail to vote by mail. At the same time, every effort must be made to **maintain in-person voting opportunities to ensure all voters have equal opportunities to cast a ballot.** Vote-by-Mail is not an equitable solution for all, including voters with certain disabilities, voters that need language assistance, people without mail access including more transient populations, voters that need to cast provisional ballots, voters displaced from their homes because of the coronavirus, or voters that need other additional assistance casting a ballot. Simply put, certain voters will be disfranchised in an all vote-by-mail system if in-person voting options aren’t also made available.

Our recommendations balance public health concerns with encouraging a robust democracy:

- Polling places and equipment must be adequately sanitized and follow the guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Polling places should be set up to **maintain “social distancing” protocols.**
- Poll workers should be trained in CDC recommendations to ensure their safety as well as the safety of voters. Poll workers should also be provided with **personal protective equipment.**
- Polling place location changes that might be necessary to protect vulnerable populations should be determined as early as possible, be ADA compliant, and be located in areas that are easily accessible to historically marginalized communities. **Polling place changes must be clearly communicated to the public** within three hours of the change before Election Day and within one hour on Election Day. The number of available polling places should remain the same to prevent crowding and lines at any polling place.
- Polling places should prepare for the casting of **a large number of provisional ballots.**
- **Expand in-person early voting** to help reduce the chances of long lines or crowds during Election Day. In-person early voting should be available for a minimum of 14 days prior to Election Day and must include at least one Saturday and one Sunday. There should be multiple, accessible locations per county and the hours should be longer than just the standard business day.



### Vote-by-Mail:

Vote-by-Mail is preferred and should be encouraged. However, it must be easy to obtain and cast a ballot and we must minimize the risk of ballots being rejected.

- **All voters should have ballots mailed to them**, with clear instructions on how to properly fill out their ballot, how to cast it, how to obtain a replacement ballot, and where they can get help with questions.
- All vote-by-mail return envelopes should have **pre-paid postage**.
- Ballot and accompanying material should be sent **in all relevant languages**, as required by the Voting Rights Act.
- Options to request replacement and return vote-by-mail ballots early in-person should be maintained but should follow the same **CDC protocols outlined for polling places** to ensure the safety of the public and election officials.
- **Allow for multiple ballot drop-off options**, including secure ballot drop-off locations and drop boxes. Like polling places, these locations should be determined as early as possible, be ADA compliant, and be located in areas that are easily accessible to historically marginalized populations. Drop box locations should be listed on the New Jersey Division of Elections website
- **Tracking procedures** for voters to track their mail-in ballots--as well as find out if it was counted, and if it was rejected, why it was rejected--should be clearly communicated and easily accessible.
- To **account for delays in mail service**, the 48-hour time period for vote-by-mail ballots to be received after the close of polls should be relaxed.
- Voters should have **easy online access** to view if they are on a list to automatically receive vote-by-mail ballots for future elections.

### Voter Education and Combating Misinformation:

- **Early, consistent, and clear communication** must be prioritized as these necessary changes are implemented. Election officials must combat voter confusion and disinformation.
- The Secretary of State's **Division of Elections website, like the Department of Health's website, should have clear, accessible information**, and as we get closer to Election Day, should be updated regularly.



### Voter Protection:

- While we hope these recommendations prevent disenfranchisement as much as possible, we still anticipate that voters will need access to Election Day judges in order to argue for their voting rights. **Election Day judges must be available** to determine eligibility.
- Voters must receive notice if their vote-by-mail ballots have been rejected because of a signature match, missing signature, or other technical issue. **Voters must be afforded an opportunity to correct issues or otherwise “cure” their ballot** to ensure their ballot is counted. The voter must also be given ways to correct vote-by-mail issues that either do not involve or that limit in-person interaction

We understand that there are no easy decisions. Every decision made during these trying times comes with repercussions and we thank you for your leadership in making these tough calls. But it is precisely during times of crisis that we most need to lean on our collective resolve to ensure a healthy and reliable democracy. It is possible to maintain secure, accessible, and fair elections, while protecting the public and not risking disenfranchisement. Our citizens need to have faith that their voices are heard, now more than ever, and we must do everything in our power to protect the sacred institution of voting. We look forward to working closely with election officials to ensure voting remains accessible to all.

Respectfully,

All of Us or None- Northern NJ  
American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey  
Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey  
BlueWaveNJ  
Center for American Progress  
DemCast USA  
Environment New Jersey  
Faith in New Jersey  
Forcing Out Recidivism Through Education (F.O.R.T.E.. House)  
Good Government Coalition of New Jersey  
Indivisible Cranbury  
League of Women Voters of New Jersey  
League of Women Voters of the United States  
Let America Vote / End Citizens United Action Fund



National Association of Social Workers - NJ Chapter  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center  
New Jersey Citizen Action  
New Jersey League of Conservation Voters  
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice  
New Jersey Policy Perspective  
New Jersey State Conference NAACP  
New Jersey Working Families  
NJ 11th For Change  
NJ Work Environment Council  
NJPIRG  
Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey  
Progressive Turnout Project  
Repair Now  
Rutgers Constitutional Rights Clinic (listed for affiliation only)  
Salvation and Social Justice  
SOMA Action  
STAND Central NJ  
UU Faith Action NJ  
Women Who Never Give Up, Inc