



contracted COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> And it is unclear even to top epidemiological experts when and how this crisis will end.

This reality presents real barriers to voters given current requirements for registering and casting a ballot in Mississippi. Given the stay-at-home order and public health concerns, many Mississippi voters will be reluctant or unable to register to vote and/or cast a ballot in person during the 2020 election cycle. Even if the stay-at-home order is lifted before the election, it is very likely that both low-risk and high-risk individuals will remain reluctant to vote in-person after months of complying with the stay-at-home order and social distancing guidelines. Your office can and must act now to ensure that Mississippi can carry out safe and democratic elections in the midst of this national crisis.

This public health crisis has created unprecedented logistical concerns for elections officials nationwide and some states have put voters in the unconscionable position of choosing between their health and their vote.<sup>5</sup> But many states are implementing innovative solutions to ensure no one has to choose between protecting their health and exercising their right to vote.

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We therefore request that you act quickly to prevent the violation of the fundamental right to vote of all eligible Mississippi voters by taking the following action:

1. **Permit every**

county clerk in person, by phone, or by mail. Since most voters will likely choose to vote by mail in 2020, this step should be made as simple as possible. For example, the absentee ballot application should be made available online. No one should be required to leave their home to request an absentee ballot application. Alternatively, circuit clerks could mail an absentee ballot to every registered voter.

3. **Notify voters of, and widely advertise, updated voter registration deadlines<sup>7</sup> and undertake extensive voter education to ensure voters know how to register and vote during the coronavirus epidemic.** Even healthy, low-risk individuals may be reluctant to vote in-person after months of complying with the stay-at-home order and

fears by clearly communicating the steps it is taking to protect Mississippi voters at the polls. An important, but simple, initial step would be to update your website 2020 Election Calendar. At present, it still incorrectly shows March 31 as the Primary Runoff Election Day, and March 2 as the registration deadline for the Primary Runoff Election, and there is no mention at all the special election. And, besides Governor there has been no other announcement that the registration deadline for the primary runoff or special elections were extended to go along with the postponed elections.

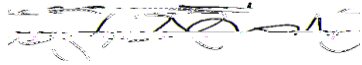
4. **Implement an online voter registration system,<sup>8</sup>** so that voters can register to vote without leaving their homes, including a process for people without state-issued IDs to register. The option to register by mail is not a sufficient substitute to online registration because many voters do not have access to printers, envelopes, and stamps at home. The online voter registration system should be fully automated, so the submission and the processing of registration applications occurs electronically.
5. **Eliminate the requirement that absentee ballot applications be notarized or witnessed** to reduce the number of public, in-person interactions necessary to cast an absentee ballot.
6. **Allow any voter or a designee to drop off their absentee ballot at any polling F7 2f104808m0**

**eligible to vote.** Because the pandemic will likely cause widespread polling place closures, you should not punish voters who cannot find their correct polling places.

8. **Allow any person designated by the voter** (including staff of nursing homes and senior centers if the voter resides in these facilities)

Given the urgency of this matter, we request your response by April 20, 2020. We are available for a call or videoconference at your convenience. We look forward to working with you.

Respectfully,



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