



June 30, 2020

The Honorable Nellie M. Gorbea  
Rhode Island Secretary of State  
State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02906

Dear Secretary Gorbea:

On behalf of the Voting Access Coalition, an alliance of more than 15 organizations in the state promoting the exercise of the franchise and fairness in elections, we thank you for your work in drafting, supporting and seeking to introduce the Safe and Healthy Voting in 2020 Act. We are deeply disappointed that the Rhode Island General Assembly abdicated its duty to the voters of the State of Rhode Island by failing to introduce, much less take up, the legislation in its recently concluded session.

In response to that inaction, and in recognition of the fact that some key deadlines are fast approaching if the state is to adequately address issues in time for the September 8th statewide Primary, we write

today to ask you to take a few essential executive measures. We believe that such initiative on your part is necessary because even if legislators were to return in a few weeks to take up your bill, it will be too late to attend to certain specific matters that have imminent deadlines for action.

First, we ask that you send applications for mail ballots to all registered voters at least 45 days prior to the September Primary as proposed in the legislation. We believe that you do not need legislative authorization to take this important step to safeguard the health of voters and preserve access to the ballot. It was an important step taken by the state for last month's Presidential Preference Primary (PPP), and it remains important for the upcoming election.

As you know, mailing applications is only one of several crucial changes that must take place in order to move to a primarily vote by mail election. We have therefore also sent a letter today to Governor Gina Raimondo asking her to issue an executive order, similar to the one she issued for the June 2nd PPP, waiving the requirement of two witness signatures or a notary signature on the voted mail ballot. We have also asked her to extend the deadline for the Board of Elections to tabulate mail ballots so long as they are postmarked by election day, or received through the mail the day after the election, knowing that more than 2,000 voters were disenfranchised during the PPP by the early deadline. We urge you to join us in calling for Governor Raimondo to take those necessary steps.

In addition, we have sent a letter to the Rhode Island Board of Elections urging them to centralize the process for qualifying mail ballots. The lack of centralization proved to be a bottleneck during the recent PPP, and we believe it contributed to many voters receiving their ballots without enough time to return them by postal mail before the election night deadline and some voters not receiving their ballots at all. Without the Board assuming that responsibility, we believe the boards of canvassers will be overwhelmed by mail ballot applications. We urge you to join us in calling on the Board of Elections to take this necessary step.

Time is running out for the voters of Rhode Island. Around the country we are seeing state legislatures, governors, secretaries of state, boards of elections, and in the last resort, courts, make needed changes to prepare for the fall elections. We urge you to show leadership in this time of crisis and commit to sending mail ballot applications to all registered voters for the September Statewide Primary, and to calling on the Governor and Board of Elections to take the steps outlined above to ensure that the upcoming Primary is a fair, equitable and safe one.

In light of the urgency of the situation, we hope to hear back from you as soon as possible about these matters. Members of our Coalition would be happy to talk with you further about them.

Sincerely,

John Marion  
Common Cause Rhode Island  
Executive Director