



MARYLAND SENATE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS

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Senator Bryan W. Simonaire
District 31

Senator Christopher West
District 42

June 25, 2020

Michael R. Cogan, Esq., Chairman
Linda H. Lamone, Esq., State Administrator
P.O. Box 6486
151 West St., Suite 200
Annapolis, MD 21401-2019

Dear Chairman Cogan and Administrator Lamone:

The Senate Republican Caucus is closely following the postmortem of the June 2nd Primary Election and the planning process for November's General Election. We read with great interest the July 23rd letter sent to you from Senate President Ferguson and Chairman Pinsky. Our members also thank you for your participation in the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee hearing earlier this month and understand the extraordinary circumstances affecting the State and Local Election Boards' ability to conduct elections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these and any challenges, free and fair elections are the foundation of our civil society and recent and continued missteps, failures and lack of accountability have shaken the public's confidence in Maryland's election process. This confidence must be restored by November's General Election.

We appreciate the proactive approach presented by the Senate President and Chairman Pinsky in their June 23rd letter and agree with their emphasis on improved accountability, communication and transparency. However, we strongly object to their recommendation for a "hybrid mail-in preferred election... that would require the Board [of Elections] to mail General Election ballots to all registered voters in Maryland."

We learned from the June 2nd primary that a more complicated process leads to more opportunities for error and fraud. For the primary, ballots were mailed to all registered voters in Maryland, and chaos resulted. Ballots were mailed to individuals who had died and who were gravely infirm and incapable of voting. Thousands of ballots were undeliverable. Many voters called and complained that their ballots had not arrived, and then they received multiple ballots. In one situation that came to our attention, an individual received both a Republican primary ballot and a Democrat primary ballot.

In addition, voters were given inconsistent information, ballots were printed with incorrect dates, ballots were not mailed at the same time across jurisdictions, and voter signatures were exposed, among other deeply concerning errors and oversights. Nearly a month later, the Baltimore County election still has not been certified. It would be foolish to repeat the same failed and expensive process for the larger General Election.

Sending thousands of unsolicited ballots to voters who have moved since they last voted will litter the state with unclaimed ballots and create serious opportunities for voter fraud. The sight of unclaimed ballots strewn about is enough to undermine public confidence in the integrity of our elections at a time when we already appear to have a crisis in public confidence in government.

The State of Maryland already has an established mail-in election option – the absentee ballot. Voters who are uncomfortable or unable to vote in person, due to COVID-19 or any other reason, may request and return an absentee ballot. The absentee voting process was put in place for exactly this reason and has been an important and successful component of the Maryland’s elections for decades.

Given the extenuating circumstances of this pandemic, our members would support moving-up the deadline to request an absentee ballot in order to give the Board of Elections enough time to respond to a greater demand and ensure that the entire process moves forward fairly and efficiently. We also recommend additional communication and marketing strategies to educate voters about the absentee voting process and necessary deadlines.

Again, we understand the new and complicated demands this pandemic has placed on the State and Local Election Boards and share President Ferguson and Chairman Pinsky’s commitment to support and assist you in any way we can. We look forward to your response as well as your report to Governor Hogan at the end of the month.

Sincerely,



Senate Minority Leader J.B. Jennings



Senate Minority Whip Steve Hershey