



Office of Brad Raffensperger
Georgia Secretary of State
214 State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
brad@sos.ga.gov

Dear Secretary of State Raffensperger:

On behalf of All Voting is Local Georgia, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., as well as the below co-signed organizations, we urge you to adopt three crucial strategies to expand and improve access to ballot return drop boxes in order to allow voting to occur as safely as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. *First*, mandate that all counties provide at least one drop box for every 15,000 to 20,000 voters; *second*, help counties access funding for drop boxes made available through The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and provide additional financial support where CARES Act funding is insufficient; and *third*, promote the availability of drop boxes and develop a centralized website listing all drop box locations in the state.

1. Mandate That All Counties Provide At Least One Drop Box for Every 15,000 to 20,000 Voters.

The Department of Homeland Security recommends one drop box for every 15,000 to 20,000 voters,¹ but most Georgia counties fall far short of this recommendation. For example, Clayton County offers only one drop box for over 185,000 active voters and Dougherty County offers only one drop box for more than 62,000 active voters.

It is critical for Georgia to take steps to meet this recommendation so that voters are not forced to choose between their health and their fundamental right to vote. No eligible voter should be disenfranchised due to circumstances outside of their control. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected the elderly, lower-income residents, and Black and Brown communities, has made in-person voting an untenable option for many voters. At the same time, those voters lack confidence that the United States Postal Service will be able to efficiently and reliably deliver the large volume of vote-by-mail ballots expected in the general election.² These concerns are especially significant in many counties in South Georgia, which

¹ "Ballot Drop Box." *Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency*. https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/vbm/Ballot_Drop_Box.pdf.

face extreme postal service delays because their mail is being routed through Florida.³ For many Georgia voters, the option to bring their absentee ballots to drop boxes has become the only acceptable choice. Moreover, an expansion of ballot drop boxes will mitigate long lines on Election Day, making it easier to accommodate voters while complying with social distancing guidelines and reducing pressure on poll workers and new voting machines.

We respectfully urge you to mandate or strongly encourage that all counties provide at least one drop box for every 15,000 to 20,000 voters. Other states, including North Carolina, Colorado, and Utah⁴, have taken similar steps to expand drop box availability for their voters, and it is important for Georgia to do so as well.⁵

2. Help Counties Access CARES Act Funding for Drop Boxes and Provide Additional Financial Support Where CARES Act Funding is Insufficient

All Voting is Local and its state partners contacted officials in over 40 Georgia counties in August and September to discuss the status and availability of drop boxes. Based on this outreach, many counties expressed concern about how they would comply with the new drop box regulations because of the inherent costs. Drop box pricing can vary, but the reasonable cost is around \$6,000 per drop box. Many counties reported that they are unable to expand the number of drop boxes due to staffing and regulatory concerns. In particular, 41% of counties reported that they are unable to expand the number of drop boxes because they lacked the staffing capacity to pick up ballots from each drop box every 24 hours as required by State Election Board rules. Although some counties reported that CARES Act funding provided some support for small increases in the number of drop boxes, in many instances CARES Act funding is insufficient. CARES Act funding can be used to purchase drop boxes but cannot be used for additional staffing to arrange for pickups. Some counties reported difficulty accessing CARES

² See Letter from United States Postal Service to Hon. Brad Raffensperger re Deadlines for Mail Ballots, July 29, 2020.

³ Bleau, Sarah. "Albany mail processing operations moving to Tallahassee." *WFXL Fox 31*. February 23, 2012. <https://wfxl.com/news/local/albany-mail-processing-operations-moving-to-tallahassee>.

⁴ Kamarck, Elaine "Report: Voting in a Pandemic: A State by State Scorecard." *The Brookings Center*. September 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/voting-by-mail-in-a-pandemic-a-state-by-state-scorecard/>

⁵ See California Executive Order N-67-20, (3)(b)(i) (June 3, 2020) available at <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/6.3.20-EO-N-67-20-text.pdf> (requiring at least one vote-by-mail drop box per 15,000 voters); Connecticut Executive Order 7QQ, New Jersey Executive Order 177 (May 20, 2020) available <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7QQ.pdf?la=en> (expanding drop box availability); New Jersey Executive Order No. 177 (Aug. 14, 2020) available at <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-177.pdf> (expanding drop box availability); see also Revised Code of Washington 29A.40.160 (requiring a minimum of one drop box per 15,000 registered voters).

Act funding, and some counties lacked accurate information about the availability of CARES Act funding.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to provide guidance to counties on how they can access CARES Act funding and provide additional financial support where CARES funding is insufficient. Specifically, we urge you to update the Secretary of State website with clear guidance on how much CARES Act funding is available, how it may be spent by counties, and how to apply, so that all counties have the information they need to take full advantage of CARES Act funding. In addition, we urge you to supplement CARES Act funding with direct grants to counties for additional drop boxes and staffing.

3. Promote the Availability of Drop Boxes and Develop a Centralized Website Listing All Drop Box Locations

Many voters are unaware of the option to deposit their ballot in a drop box. Moreover, many voters who are aware of the existence of drop boxes have expressed frustration over difficulties finding drop boxes in their community. These challenges are compounded by the fact that counties are often forced to place drop boxes indoors or in other locations that are difficult to access in order to comply with the requirement that drop boxes must be under video surveillance.⁶ Many counties fail to list drop box locations on their websites and fail to educate voters on the existence or location of drop boxes.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to widely promote drop locations to voters through all available and reasonable means, including through mail, text, and phone calls, web postings, and signs at polling sites and government buildings. We urge county officials to do the same. We also urge you to prepare a centralized website listing the location of all drop boxes in the state.

We, the undersigned, urge you to implement these commonsense and nonpartisan recommendations so that Georgia voters can safely and successfully cast their ballots in the upcoming November general election. We ask that you respond in writing by **September 30, 2020**. In addition, if you have questions or would like to discuss these issues in the meantime, please contact Aklima Khondoker by email at aklima@allvotingislocal.org or telephone at (678) 628-8298.

Respectfully,

⁶ Rule 183-1-14-0.6-.14 (04) Secure Absentee Ballot Drop Boxes. *Georgia Election Code Chapter 183-1*.



Aklima Khondoker
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NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.

Co-signed,

ACLU of Georgia
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta
Coalicion de Lideres Latinos-CLILA
Feminist Women's Health Center
Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials (GALEO)
Georgia Conservation Voters
Georgia Equality
Georgia Muslim Voter Project
Georgia NAACP
Informed Georgians for Justice
League of Women Voters of Georgia
New American Pathways
New Georgia Project
Planned Parenthood Southeast Advocates
Public Wise
Rep GA Institute, Inc.
Represent GA Action Network, Inc
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)