



June 17, 2020

Dear Governor Abbott, Secretary of State Hughes, Local Voting Officials,
and Local Party Leaders,

We write to encourage you to do everything in your power to ensure the health and safety of voters as they exercise their civic duty in July and November. In early June, Texas reported a record number of COVID-19 hospitalizations for 3 days in a row. Also, just days ago, multiple states went forward with elections where many voters voted in person and in some cases waited in long and dangerous lines. With cases on the rise and challenges in other states serving as a warning, Texas must take action now to protect voters.

As you respond to COVID-19, please consider the undersigned advocacy groups as a resource in your work to develop a response plan that protects the health, safety, and civil liberties of all Texans. We support a plan that expands voter registration and extends early voting to garner the largest possible participation given the obvious public health concerns. There is sufficient time to prepare for successful elections in spite of COVID-19 if the State and counties act now.

First, we applaud the state's extension of early voting for the July 14 runoff and announcement that the Governor will also extend early voting in November. We encourage the state to further extend the early voting period to include the weekend directly prior to election day. We further encourage the Governor to make concrete his announcement that he will extend early voting during the November election. Providing voters with more options of times, days, and locations to vote will help protect voters and poll-workers as it would allow for smaller gatherings in polling places¹.

Second, the state should provide guidance and support, including funding, to local election offices to set up additional polling places and curbside voting options to allow for distanced voting. Jurisdictions should avoid consolidating polling places in the July and November elections to prevent crowding at the polls.

Third, voting machines should be accessible to all voters, regardless of party affiliation. The March primary election demonstrated how dividing machines based on party affiliation can contribute to long lines. Overcrowding at polling places will endanger voters' health during the pandemic. State leaders, including leadership of the state

¹ It remains an open question whether Governor Abbott's emergency powers allow him to supersede provisions of the Texas Election Code. The undersigned organizations' advocacy in this letter is not meant to be, and should not be taken as, their position on the ultimate lawfulness of the Governor's use of his emergency powers to modify election procedures, laws, and policies.

Democratic and Republican parties, should encourage county parties to adopt consolidated voting machine practices.

Fourth, the state should eliminate or significantly reduce the 30-day deadline to register before an election. Voters have been told by both the State and local governments not to leave their homes and many places at which voters would normally register--such as DPS locations--were closed for significant periods of time. Eliminating or significantly reducing the registration cutoff would account for these roadblocks to registration, for meaningful participation.

Finally, we urge the Secretary of State and local officials to reconsider your decision not to provide appropriate protective gear, cleaning supplies, and hand sanitizer at all polling places, and training poll-workers in safety procedures. We are prepared to support an effort to recruit additional poll-workers to help staff extended early voting.

We appreciate your attention to the voting rights of all Texans and the important work that will be required to keep Texans safe in the upcoming elections. We are happy to meet in person or by phone to discuss how best to protect civil liberties in your COVID-19 response planning. Please contact Erica Sanchez at [REDACTED] if we can be of service.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Texas
All on the LineCampus Vote Project
Children's Defense Fund of Texas
Common Cause
Common Ground for Texans
Engage Action
Fair Elections Center
League of Women Voters
MOVE Texas Action Fund
Progress Texas
Protect Democracy
Stand Up Republic - Texas
TCRP