

Resolution in Support of Strategies to Protect Voter Integrity for the 2020 General Election

Whereas, Mayor Muriel Bowser and public health officials have taken steps to slow community transmission of coronavirus by issuing a Stay-at-Home Order directing residents to stay at home except to perform essential activities; and

Whereas, physical distancing guidance is expected to continue through the District of Columbia's Primary Election in June and the General Election in November; and

Whereas, DC Board of Elections (BOE) traditionally manages DC's 144 voting precincts, which contain the polling stations where voters cast their ballots, but will remain closed on election days in June 2020; and

Whereas, BOE has instead expanded the 15 early voting centers, where early voting typically occurs, to 20 centers to accommodate additional voters; and

Whereas, BOE has also announced a Vote Safe DC campaign in response to the public health emergency, which includes efforts to encourage voters to stay home and submit requests for absentee ballots to vote by mail for the June 2nd primary and June 16th special election in Ward 2; and

Whereas, BOE's Vote Safe DC campaign strongly urges voters to request a mail-in ballot instead of in-person voting to reduce their risk of contracting or spreading the coronavirus, there are still information gaps on the process for voters; and

Whereas, the public health emergency demonstrates the concrete and immediate need to commit to full vote-by-mail elections, where ballots are mailed to every registered voter; and

Whereas, ANC 1C expresses gratitude to Ward 1 Councilmember Brianne Nadeau and seven other councilmembers who have attempted to address voter access prior to the recent health emergency by introducing the Vote by Mail Amendment Act of 2019 (B23-0319); and

Whereas, the Vote by Mail Amendment Act of 2019 (B23-0319) was discussed in a public hearing October 30, 2019 and received positive testimony from most witnesses, including: American Postal Workers Union, Jew United for Justice, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, and community leaders from Ward 8 Democrats, Ward 3 Democrats, and Commissioner John Zottoli (testifying in his capacity as a resident); and

Whereas, in the 2018 General Election, DC had a voter turnout rate of 46.29% (231,700 ballots cast out of 512,167 registered voters) but only 12,599 ballots were cast using an absentee ballot (~5.4%); and

Whereas, due to the extensive requirements to scale and to implement a vote-by mail system, ANC 1C recommends that the BOE, DC Council, and Mayor Bowser address the following recommendations in preparation for the General Election in November:

1. BOE mail every registered voter an absentee ballot application with postage paid return envelope, independent of the General Election Voter Guide
2. BOE mail every DC resident postcard on new election guidance/process
3. Upgrade DC BOE website, so that registered voters may request their absentee ballot without the need to print, sign, and mail the request
4. Update phone DCBOE application for all users, including both Android and Apple platforms
5. Significantly increase communication on social media, radio, TV, and other mediums specifically targeted at traditionally low-voter populations
6. Include election workers and temporary election workers/volunteers as “essential employees”, therefore guaranteeing PPE and a safe workspace that abides by physical distancing guidelines
7. Identify space and funds to account for increased temporary staffing for expected increased absentee ballot verification
8. Install secure, 24/7 ballot drop boxes at strategic, high traffic areas in all 8 wards

Therefore, ANC 1C calls on the BOE, Mayor Muriel Bowser and the DC Council to adequately fund measures to satisfy the recommendations provided; and

Further resolved; ANC 1C calls on the DC Council to pass and Mayor Muriel Bowser enact vote-by mail legislation for future elections, after the General Election of 2020.