

# TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



PHILIP CORTEZ, Ph.D.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

*District 117*

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Governor of Texas  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, TX 78711  
Delivered via Email

Dear Governor Abbott,

The ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic has created a situation in which regular polling location practices in Texas would not fall along health and safety guidelines laid out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We have considered the needs of our constituents during this crisis: their restricted mobility, their reduced income, and their health concerns. Therefore, we would like to recommend the following steps to adapt our election systems and processes during this pandemic to ensure every eligible voter in Texas has an opportunity to cast a ballot in the upcoming primary runoff election and in the November general election. We must create a plan to allow Texans to fully exercise their constitutional rights safely, while ensuring every voter has full faith and trust in the electoral process.

As members of the Texas House of Representatives, we are following closely the ongoing pandemic and federal and state responses. We understand that the recent federal stabilization package allocated \$400 million to support states in preparing and adapting their elections to the challenges posed by the novel coronavirus. We understand that of the \$400 million, approximately \$24.4 million will be allocated to Texas, and with a required 20% match by the state, the minimum amount Texas will dedicate to this effort is about \$29.3 million. The funding allocation from Congress was created to help us prepare for and respond to the coronavirus's impact on our elections. If we use that funding to begin planning and working to adapt our election systems now, we can make vote by mail more physically and financially accessible to voters, enhance the election office's personnel capacity to manage the mail voting process; and procure safety equipment for those who choose to vote in-person. These efforts will ensure that no Texan has to choose between their right to vote and their health.

The CDC guidance for reducing the transmission of COVID-19 at polling places recommends that states "encourage voters to use voting methods that minimize direct contact with other people and reduce crowd size at polling stations," with encouraging mail-in voting at the very top of their list. We respectfully request your office and the Secretary of State begin preparing to implement an expanded vote-by-mail system and provide guidance and support to county election officials about how to implement this system. With nearly three months until our next election; our election officials need that full time period to



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prepare for and manage these changes. To best support Texas voters and ensure they have meaningful opportunities to vote without putting their or election workers health in danger, we recommend that allocation be spent to:

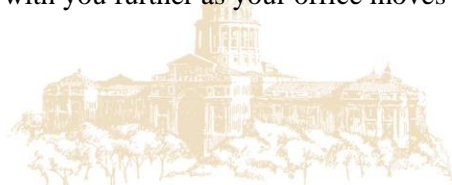
1. Send a mail ballot application to every registered voter
2. Provide a prepaid returnable envelope with each application
3. Provide a prepaid returnable envelope with each mail ballot
4. Provide an opportunity online for a voter to track their application and ballot through the process
5. Procure safety supplies for early voting sites and Election Day polling places

Additionally, we have already heard from constituents who typically serve as election workers, that they are not willing to serve in this role for the primary runoffs and for the November general election out of concern for their health. They are unwilling to put their health at risk by interacting with hundreds or even thousands of voters over the course of the 12 hours polls are open on Election Day in addition to the early voting period. Since so many of our election workers are 65 years old or older and therefore at high risk for contracting the coronavirus, reducing the number of election workers needed to manage polling places while also seeking new recruits who are from less high-risk groups may be necessary.

Finally, we must ensure that our early voting sites and Election Day polling places are as safe as possible for both voters and election workers. In-person voting requires voters and election workers to be in close proximity to one another as the voter's ID is checked and they sign in to vote. To make this as safe as possible, we must provide personal protective equipment to our election workers. Furthermore, to reduce the opportunities for transmission between voters, voting machines may need to be sanitized regularly, as your office noted in Election Advisory 2020-14. EAC funds should be used to procure these safety and sanitation supplies.

While there are a number of additional adaptations that will be needed, we encourage you to consult with the election officials that will be responsible for managing this election under these difficult circumstances. We strongly urge you to prioritize voters and their needs as you consider how we use the EAC funding to prepare for and execute this election amid a global pandemic. Everyday Texans are suffering immensely, and we owe it to them to not add insult to injury by asking them to stand in crowded lines to vote or otherwise risk their health in order to do their civic duty and cast their ballot in the upcoming primary runoff election.

Governor Abbott, we respectfully request a response regarding the steps listed above. We would be happy to discuss these recommendations with you further as your office moves this process forward.



TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



PHILIP CORTEZ, Ph.D.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

*District 117*

Yours in service,

Handwritten signature of Philip Cortez in black ink.

Vice Chairman Philip Cortez, Ph.D.  
House Committee on Elections

Handwritten signature of Celia Israel in black ink.

Representative Celia Israel

Handwritten signature of Art Fierro in black ink.

Representative Art Fierro

Handwritten signature of John Bucy in black ink.

Representative John Bucy

Handwritten signature of Chris Turner in black ink.

Representative Chris Turner

Handwritten signature of Rafael Anchia in black ink.

Representative Rafael Anchia

Handwritten signature of Ina Minjarez in black ink.

Representative Ina Minjarez

Handwritten signature of Julie Johnson in black ink.

Representative Julie Johnson

Handwritten signature of Ray Lopez in black ink.

Representative Ray Lopez

Handwritten signature of Armando Martinez in black ink.

Representative Armando Martinez

Handwritten signature of Leo Pacheco in blue ink.

Representative Leo Pacheco

Handwritten signature of Jon Rosenthal in purple ink.

Representative Jon Rosenthal



TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



PHILIP CORTEZ, Ph.D.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

District 117

Representative Vikki Goodwin

Representative Alex Dominguez

Representative Anna Eastman

Representative Barbara Gervin-Hawkins

Representative Christina Morales

Representative Gina Hinojosa

Representative Lina Ortega

Representative Nicole Collier

Representative Carl Sherman

Representative Trey Martinez-Fisher

Representative Erin Zwiener

Representative Armando Walle

Representative Cesar Blanco

Representative Diego Bernal

Representative Jessica Gonzalez

Representative Ramon Romero

Representative Roland Gutierrez

Representative Terry Meza



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PHILIP CORTEZ, Ph.D.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

*District 117*

Handwritten signature of Victoria Neave in black ink.

Representative Victoria Neave

Handwritten signature of James Talarico in black ink.

Representative James Talarico

Handwritten signature of Michelle Beckley in black ink.

Representative Michelle Beckley

Handwritten signature of Eugene Wu in black ink.

Representative Eugene Wu

Handwritten signature of Mary Ann Perez in blue ink.

Representative Mary Ann Perez

Handwritten signature of Lorraine Birabil in black ink.

Representative Lorraine Birabil

Handwritten signature of Ana Hernandez in black ink.

Representative Ana Hernandez

Handwritten signature of Terry Canales in black ink.

Representative Terry Canales

Handwritten signature of Jarvis Johnson in black ink.

Representative Jarvis Johnson

Handwritten signature of Abel Herrero in black ink.

Representative Abel Herrero

Handwritten signature of Donna Howard in black ink.

Representative Donna Howard

Handwritten signature of Ana-Marie Ramos in black ink, enclosed in a rectangular box.

Representative Ana-Marie Ramos

Handwritten signature of Gina Calanni in black ink.

Representative Gina Calanni

Handwritten signature of Rhetta Andrews Bowers in black ink.

Representative Rhetta Andrews Bowers

