March 19th, 2020

Dear Governor Northam:

In light of the severity and urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, I write to request for you to direct the Department of Elections to consider the feasibility of executing an all vote-by-mail system in Virginia for this November’s election. Under this model, all registered voters would automatically receive a ballot via mail. This system is utilized in several states including Colorado, Hawaii, Utah, Washington, and Oregon. I would also ask that your Administration prepare a report for General Assembly members that evaluates the costs and benefits of an all vote-by-mail system.

Enacting an entire vote-by-mail election will take real logistical effort on the part of our government to execute well. That is why it is essential that we determine the program’s feasibility as soon as possible to give ourselves the best chance to ensure every voting age citizen of the Commonwealth a safe means of exercising their right to vote.

I commend the recent efforts by the Department of Elections to ensure strong voter participation in the upcoming May election cycle by allowing citizens to select “Reason 2A: My Disability or Illness” to vote by absentee ballot. Additionally, during the 2020 Session, we took great strides in passing legislation that makes it easier to vote by mail. For example, HB 1, sponsored by Delegate Herring, removes the need to list a reason to vote by absentee ballot; thus, permitting any registered voter to apply to vote by mail.

While we hope that this pandemic will have subsided by November, it is prudent to prepare for the possibility of needing to hold an all vote-by-mail election, and I strongly believe that we should strengthen these efforts and prepare for an extended pandemic. If we keep our current system, I am concerned that we would have limited time to inform all voters on how to apply for an absentee ballot. Additionally, people whose lives are disrupted by COVID-19 may have difficulty meeting current registration deadlines, resulting in greater disenfranchisement. Our current system also relies on polling stations, often held at nursing homes and school sites, which may place many volunteers at heightened risk of exposure. We can avoid confusion and conflict by taking initiative to ensure that all registered voters automatically receive a vote-by-mail ballot.

The COVID-19 pandemic should not disrupt our ability to exercise our voice and engage civically. Thank you for the measures you have signed into law making access to the ballot more accessible for all Virginians. I hope that you will strongly consider this request.

Sincerely,

Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy
Member, Virginia House of Delegates
2nd District