

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 18, 2020

Dear Registrar,

There is enormous interest nationwide in the upcoming election, with record interest in absentee voting across the Commonwealth. However, the current public health emergency and recent changes to longstanding Postal Service policies have raised concerns about the ability of Americans to safely exercise their franchise through absentee balloting. We write to urge you to do as much as feasible to ensure all Virginians can access their right to vote, including taking advantage of the historic steps Virginia recently took to expand early voting.

During the primary season, the pandemic caused delays and hazardous conditions for voters nationwide. Going forward, it is evident that substantive measures must be taken to ensure that no American must choose between their franchise and their health. The urgent need for safe voting procedures, including safe, secure alternatives to voting in-person on Election Day, has significantly increased interest in convenience voting opportunities.

We understand you are currently preparing to handle the anticipated surge in absentee voting, both in-person and by mail, and we urge you to be thoughtful about those steps, particularly in light of delays in the processing of mail as a result of changes made to the U.S. Postal Service.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has made major strides in recent years to increase access to the franchise. Prior to the current public health emergency, Virginia not only expanded early voting opportunities, but also implemented no-excuse absentee voting. We urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that both of these important safeguards of the American franchise can be fully exercised, including by working with your local governance body to expand the number of satellite sites where in-person absentee voting is available and the number of business hours during which those sites are open. To the extent that you face constraints in this context, including in finding adequate numbers of poll workers to staff early voting sites or securing resources to organize safe polling locations, we urge you to immediately alert officials at the Virginia Department of Elections, as well as our offices.

As we approach the election, a fulsome understanding of the situation and needs across Virginia will be crucial to shaping a legislative response.

Americans are experiencing great hardship as a result of the ongoing public health emergency. For months, we have advocated for additional resources for local election officials grappling with the unprecedented voter turnout that is expected this November in the midst of a pandemic. While these requests have been ignored to this point, we hope to continue advocating for and amplifying the needs of Virginia's elections officials during this critical time.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator