

NEWS RELEASE

County of Warren, New Jersey
For Immediate Release



Warren County Freeholders Oppose Exclusive Use of Vote By Mail

(WHITE TOWNSHIP, NJ – August 12, 2020) – Warren County’s freeholders are taking a stand against the exclusive use of mail-in ballots in this November’s election and future elections.

Instead, they are urging the Secretary of State and County Clerks to utilize in person voting in conjunction with mail-in balloting.

“I realize people’s concern as we’ve been fighting coronavirus in the county,” Freeholder Jason J. Sarnoski said, adding, “This does not mean that people will not have the option to vote by mail.” But the resolution unanimously adopted opposes running an election with all mail-in ballots, he said.

People who cannot get out to vote or with concerns about voting in person will be able to request absentee ballots, Sarnoski said, a stance his freeholder colleagues also backed.

“I think there’s a middle ground here that the Governor can consider,” Freeholder James R. Kern III said, noting that vote-by-mail is available. But sending ballots to everyone registered to a political party in the primary was problematic, and resulted in a large amount of returned mail, Kern said.

The state could consider other options to conduct a safe election during the pandemic, including having multiple days of voting as well as absentee ballots, Kern said.

“To just push this through and not work with our county clerks on this matter, the people who are the front line of this issue, is wrong,” Kern noted.

Freeholder Director Richard D. Gardner also mentioned the possibility of staging voting to reduce crowding at polling places, in addition to requesting absentee ballots. But “to do a blanket mail-out is a little bit precarious,” Gardner said, resulting in a burden on county election offices. Moreover, “people move, people pass on,” and a mass mailing of ballots results in problems, he said.

Warren County Clerk Holly Mackey agreed, noting, “We have a Vote By Mail program in place for those who do not want to or cannot vote in person. We have Social Distancing guidelines and appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) for both our poll workers and the public to keep everyone as safe as possible. Warren County voters should have the right to choose how they want to vote in the upcoming Presidential Election, period. I applaud the Freeholders for approving this resolution and encourage the Governor to take the will of the people he serves into consideration.”

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**RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF MAIL-IN-BALLOTS
FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION IN NOVEMBER, 2020**

WHEREAS the State of New Jersey has a Secretary of State and County Clerks in each of the 21 counties whose duties include the administration and overseeing of elections; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey will be holding a General Election in November 2020; and

WHEREAS, mail-in ballots were used exclusively in the Primary Election in July, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the practice of exclusively using mail-in ballots to all registered voters caused concerns for voter fraud in mail-in elections and significant delays in counting ballots; and

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Attorney General has already charged individuals with illegally collecting or processing ballots in an election which occurred in Paterson, New Jersey in 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Attorney General's charges against individuals, including two winning City Council candidates, alleges that votes had been cast in the names of deceased individuals and residents who indicated they had not even received a vote by mail ballot; and

WHEREAS, election officials in Paterson admitted that more than 3,000 mail-in ballots, or about 19% of those submitted, were disqualified; and

WHEREAS, the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, the NAACP New Jersey State Conference and a disabled voter have filed complaints in the Federal District Court against New Jersey Secretary of State, Tahesha Way, alleging that the current law regarding the verification of "vote by mail" (VBM) ballots violates both the 1st and 14th amendments of the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, statistics show that mail-in ballot rejections in 2018, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in rejection of mail-in ballots totaling thousands statewide; and

WHEREAS, the United States Election Assistance Commission's election administration and voting survey data set for the 2018 election found that 6,052 mail-in ballots were rejected for signature problems with 1,913 of those specifically because of nonmatching signatures; and

WHEREAS, well before the COVID-19 pandemic, New Jersey law permitted voting by mail for any reason, or no reason at all, allowing any voter, even remotely concerned about this or any other contagious disease the option to request a mail-in ballot thus enhancing voter choice; and

WHEREAS, some voters have expressed an opinion of wishing to "wait" until Election Day to cast their ballot electronically for the candidate of their choice to fully assess the latest information available; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Warren County are gravely concerned that the exclusive mail-in ballot "experiment" has been difficult at best and during the Primary Election cycle representing a small fraction of the ballots to be cast when compared to the upcoming General Election; and

WHEREAS, even as this Board considers the within resolution, the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey is bringing at least four (4) separate actions to modify the dates to "certify" the Primary Election results due to the fact that the votes cannot be counted in a timely manner; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Warren County do not believe that voting "experiments" should be conducted when selecting the individuals to lead political parties, local governments, Boards of Education, county governments, state government or the federal government; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Warren County feel strongly that voter "choice" should refer to "how" to vote, not just "who" to vote for in a given election cycle,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders oppose the exclusive use of mail-in balloting in the General Election in November, 2020 and in all future elections.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Warren County Board of Chosen Freeholders urges the Secretary of State and County Clerks to utilize in person voting in conjunction with mail-in balloting in the General Election of November, 2020 and in all future elections.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk forward a certified true copy of this resolution to the New Jersey Secretary of State; the Governor of the State of New Jersey; the President of the New Jersey State Senate; the Speaker of the General Assembly; the Warren County Legislative Delegation, the New Jersey Association of Counties and all other Boards of Chosen Freeholders.