



# Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

## *MEMORANDUM*

To: Michael Cogan, Chairman, Maryland State Board of Elections  
Linda Lamone, Esq., Administrator, Maryland State Board of Elections

From: David Garreis, President  
Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO)

Date: August 5, 2020

Re: Plan for Success - 2020 Presidential General Election

The members of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) are writing to provide our plan for the successful conduct of the 2020 Presidential General Election. The State of Maryland is at a critical juncture in the Election process. There are slightly more than 90-days until Election Day. The Election Community must have a set-in-stone plan for the conduct of the General Election. Failure to do so will result in the failure of the Election process in Maryland. MAEO has provided the Maryland State Board of Elections (SBE) and the Governor with our professional, non-partisan recommendations for conducting the General Election in writing and in conference call meetings several times. MAEO is dedicated to providing all eligible voters with the ability to cast their ballot in a safe and secure manner.

We are making our final appeal to your decision making authority before we enter a period where no amount of backpedaling or last minute changes will avoid a catastrophic failure of the 2020 Presidential General Election. We are providing four common-sense recommendations for the conduct of the Election in the hopes that the powers that be will find a way to adopt these policies and provide the voters of Maryland with a convenient and hassle-free opportunity to vote, either by mail-in ballot, during early voting, or on Election Day.

### **2020 General Election Plan**

- **Vote Centers**

Nearly all 24 Local Election Boards (LEBs) in Maryland are suffering a severe shortage of Election Judges constituting an emergency situation. Many LEBs have provided consolidation plans for SBE's consideration at this meeting. The LEBs are concerned that consolidation is a band-aid on a problem that requires surgery. Given the Election Judge shortages, including 14,832, an increase of 1,303 vacancies since the Governor requested State Employees serve as Election Judges, the Election Judge problem is a significant failure point for the General Election. Additionally, 99 locations have declined to allow their facilities to serve as polling places on Election Day.

SBE needs to adopt vote centers, to operate from Thursday, October 29, 2020 through Tuesday, November 3, 2020. Each LBE should operate the equivalent number of voter centers as Early Voting sites in their jurisdiction and have the option of adding up to two additional sites. This will eliminate voter confusion by allowing voters to cast their ballot at any vote center operating in the jurisdiction and will reduce the likelihood of voters using provisional ballots to vote. Due to the economies of scale, the LEBs can utilize

their largest facilities to increase the number of ballot scanners, check-in stations, ballot marking devices, and privacy booths while also maintaining social distancing rules to keep voters and election judges safe during the on-going public health crisis.

- **Centralized Vote by Mail Application Processing Center**

The LBEs are receiving Vote by Mail applications at a higher rate this year at this point in the Election cycle than in any previous Election. Large LBEs such as Montgomery County have received nearly 30,000 Vote by Mail applications already. Due to the high volume of applications, the LBEs will need to hire more temporary staff. In many cases this will make social distancing and safe practices difficult or impossible at many offices. Additionally, if the LBE has a staff member report to work with Coronavirus, their staff members may need to take fourteen days or more off work when they are most needed to work in person. There is currently no viable backup plan in place in the event the LBEs have a coronavirus outbreak and must shutdown temporarily.

SBE needs to establish a Centralized Vote by Mail Application Data Processing Center. In this proposal, all applications mailed by SBE will be returned to one central location in Maryland which will be responsible for entering the Vote by Mail ballot request information into the existing statewide voter registration database and generating a ballot request for a vendor to mail the ballot. This will take advantage of the economies of scale while allowing the LBEs to concentrate on other critical tasks related to the election, including preparing the voting system, training election judges, and canvassing returned mail-in ballots. As always, MAEO is willing to assist SBE with the logistics of implementing a Centralized Vote by Mail Application Processing Center.

- **Canvassing Returned Vote by Mail Ballots 30 days before Election Day**

Based on lessons learned from the 2020 Presidential Primary Election in Maryland, the LBEs will need several weeks to canvass the returned mail-in ballots. SBE needs to authorize the canvassing of the mail-in ballots beginning one month prior to Election Day on Monday, October 5, 2020. If mail-in ballots are returned at an equivalent rate as the Primary Election, the LBEs will need additional time to canvass the ballots, or the final results of the Election will be delayed. The LBEs cannot begin the first canvass of the ballots as it is currently scheduled on November 5, 2020 and expect to finish by the scheduled Absentee 2 Canvass on November 13, 2020. Allowing the LBEs to canvass the ballots in October and embargo the results, as is already the procedure for Early Voting, will allow the LBEs to provide mail-in ballot results on Election Day and the timely completion of the canvassing process. This process was already successfully utilized in the 2020 Primary.

- **Adjusting the Vote by Mail Application Deadline by 1 Week**

Previous experience has taught the LBEs many voters wait until the last minute to send their mail-in ballot application. SBE needs to move the deadline to return the mail-in ballot application forward one week from the current deadline. The current deadline is October 27, 2020, which does not leave the LBEs with enough time to process vote by mail requests and mail the ballots. Nor does it leave enough time for the voter to vote the ballots and return them. The deadline needs to be moved to October 21, 2020.

Chairman Cogan

August 5, 2020

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Thank you for considering these proposals. We would like to remind the Board one final time that the success or failure of the Election is in your hands. Any delay in the adoption of policies and procedures for the conduct of this election will have catastrophic consequences for the 2020 Presidential General Election in Maryland. With 90-days until Election Day, this is your final opportunity to adjust course and save the election process in Maryland.

cc: The Honorable Governor Lawrence Hogan