

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Raffensperger Takes Unprecedented Steps to Protect Safety and Voter Integrity in Georgia

(ATLANTA) -- Secretary of State Raffensperger is taking unprecedented steps to protect the public health of Georgia voters while also upholding the integrity of the vote. These temporary steps are being made because of the COVID-19 pandemic threatening public health in Georgia and around the world.

Secretary Raffensperger will be mailing absentee ballot request forms to every Georgia voter. This extraordinary effort to ensure all Georgians can vote without fear for their health will supplement extra measures to ensure those who rely on in-person voting to access the ballot can do so safely.

“Times of turbulence and upheaval like the one we Georgians face require decisive action if the liberties we hold so dear are to be preserved,” said Raffensperger. “I am acting today because the people of Georgia, from the earliest settlers to heroes like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Congressman John Lewis, have fought too long and too hard for their right to vote to have it curtailed. Georgia has faced challenges before and overcome them, and we can do so again through the grit and ingenuity that has made America a shining example for democracies around the world.”

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger is moving to increase Georgia voter access and protect the public health of voters and poll workers during the COVID-19 emergency through increased mail in voting. In the 2016 and 2018 November elections, around 95 percent of Georgia voters opted to cast their ballot in person versus the 5 percent who did so by mail. With social distancing as the most important tool for limiting the spread of coronavirus, providing alternatives to voting in person is crucial. All Georgia voters can request and vote an absentee ballot for any reason.

Raffensperger will send absentee ballot request forms to the Georgia’s 6.9 million voters in an effort to allow as many Georgia voters as possible to exercise their right to vote without leaving their homes. In doing so, Raffensperger will literally be dropping a way to vote in safety and security on each Georgia voter’s doorstep. They will simply have to fill out and return the application to vote by mail in the upcoming elections with no in-person risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Georgia’s most vulnerable, those over age 65 and those with a disability, can request absentee ballots for the primary and general election as well as all elections through the 2020 election cycle with this one application. Other voters will need to submit another application for future elections. The elderly and disabled will be able to vote in safety and security.

While Secretary Raffensperger is encouraging as many voters as possible to vote by mail, some rely on in-person voting to exercise their right to vote privately and securely. People without

internet or mail access, such as those experiencing homelessness; Georgians who need language assistance; and people with disabilities who rely on voting machines to cast their ballot will still be able to do so in person on the state's new voting system. Additionally, research from the Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law shows that eliminating "in-person voting could disproportionately disenfranchise Black, Latino, and young voters". Their right to vote too needs protection.

To that end, Raffensperger is taking extra steps to limit the threat of COVID-19 at the polling place. Poll workers will receive additional resources to clean the equipment regularly. In-person voters who show up to vote in person will be instructed to maintain a safe distance when waiting to vote.

These measures will protect poll workers as well. Understanding the extra risk Georgia's generally elderly poll workers face, Raffensperger is working to help counties hire more and younger poll workers. Extra staff will allow those who feel sick to be absent from the polls without significantly impacting continuity while a younger pool of workers will increase resiliency in the face of the COVID-19 threat.

Senate President Pro Tempore Butch Miller commended Raffensperger for taking initiative to safeguard health and preserve voter access.

"I want to applaud Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and his office for taking decisive measures in this time of crisis," Miller said. "These steps are critical in this temporary environment to protect our poll workers and give our counties time to successfully plan for the Georgia General Primary in May. Make no mistake about it, the members of the majority caucus and I remain committed to keep the General Primary on May 19th."

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger is taking these unprecedented actions for the safety and security of Georgia's voters. Through these decisive steps, Raffensperger is protecting public health and the right to vote in Georgia.

###