



Craig Latimer
Supervisor of Elections

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Special Committee on Election Integrity & Reform, Pennsylvania State Senate

Opening Statement from Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Craig Latimer

March 15, 2020

Thank you for inviting me to join you today. I am happy to share information with you about the successful use of Vote By Mail in my county. Hillsborough County, Florida is the fourth largest county in the state, with more than 934,000 registered voters during the 2020 General Election.

Florida has had no-excuse Vote By Mail since 2002. Over the years, more and more voters have chosen this method of voting. In Hillsborough County, it had become common to expect that about one-third of our voters would choose Vote By Mail in any election. In the 2020 General Election, Vote By Mail made up 47% of votes cast. It was the method chosen by almost 338,000 voters. And with a two-card ballot, that meant we had approximately 675,000 ballots to scan and tabulate.

Vote By Mail was an especially attractive voting method in 2020 because of the pandemic, and we were fortunate to have laws in place designed to ensure the integrity of Vote By Mail. Those established laws set us up to be able to successfully process and tabulate mail ballots in a timely and efficient manner in 2020, a year in which we were all faced with extraordinary challenges.

VoteHillsborough.gov



(813) 744 - 5900

Fred B. Karl County Center

601 E. Kennedy Blvd., 16th Floor, Tampa, FL 33602

Robert L. Gilder Elections Service Center

2514 N. Falkenburg Rd., Tampa, FL 33619

See website for regional office locations.

Specifically, Florida law requires that registered voters must request Vote By Mail to receive mail ballots, and those requests remain in effect through two General Election cycles. Ballots are not forwardable, so if a voter moves and forgets to cancel their ballot request, the ballot will be returned undeliverable to our office.

Voted ballots are verified by matching the signature on the envelope to the signature in the voter's file, and all Supervisors must provide ballot tracking on their websites so that voters can confirm their voted ballot has been received.

Florida's laws also require that mail ballots be received by my office no later than 7 p.m. Election Day to be counted. I worked hard to educate my voters to ensure they had the information they needed to meet the deadlines for requesting and returning mail ballots.

I also made it as easy as possible for them to get those ballots back in. For years, I've paid the return postage so that voters can mail their voted ballots back to my office without having to find or pay for a stamp. That's not required by law, but I have seen many Supervisors adopting this practice, as well.

The current law does require us to provide a drop-box at each of our offices and in-person Early Voting sites, so that voters can drop their mail ballots off in person. In an effort to minimize the number of people inside our offices and Early Voting sites, and to provide voters with an easy, contactless way to return their ballot, I moved our drop-off boxes to curbside tents, so that voters could drive up and drop their ballots off. The drop-off boxes were staffed and sealed at all times and used by more than 45% of our Vote By Mail voters.

As we saw in the 2020 election, timely reporting is a critical factor in ensuring confidence in election results. Here again, we were fortunate to have strong laws in place. Florida law allows us to begin opening and tabulating Vote By Mail ballots 22 days prior to an election. In anticipation of greater Vote By Mail participation during the 2020 presidential election, the Governor issued an executive order allowing mail ballot canvassing to begin several days earlier than that.

Having the ability to open and tabulate mail ballots well in advance of Election Day is vital to timely election results reporting. As an elections administrator, I know how many mail ballots have been mailed out and how many are received each day, and can adjust my staffing plans in order to keep up with the volume of Vote By Mail ballots coming back to my office. For that reason, we never fell behind in our Vote By Mail processing in 2020, despite receiving more mail ballots than ever before. On Election Night, results from Hillsborough County's in-person Early Voting and Vote By Mail were reported shortly after 7 p.m., and those results made up 85% of our total results.

It was widely reported that Florida was a shining star on Election Night, with the vast majority of our state's election results reported that evening. I'll conclude with a quote from our Secretary of State Laurel Lee and will be happy to answer your questions later today. In the words of Secretary Lee:

"Florida ensured a safe and efficient voting process and all Florida voters, no matter how they chose to cast a ballot, or who they voted for, could be confident in the integrity of our elections system and the security of their vote."

Thank you.