Frequently Asked Questions (Request Your Mail-in Ballot)

The following section contains a list of Frequently Asked Questions. Please review the questions below before you contact the DC Board of Elections (BOE or the Board).

Election Change Decision

Q: How long has BOE been considering this change in the election process?
A: The Board has been considering this change since the beginning of March 2020.

Q: What factors aside from COVID-19 were taken into consideration?
A: The BOE has made an accommodation to allow for social distancing, but the agency has a functioning system that has successfully handled other types of challenges in the past. No additional factors were found during the agency’s risk assessment as requiring immediate action outside of our normal processes.

Q: Who were the decision makers in this process?
A: The Board Chair and Executive Director of the BOE were the primary decision makers, with support and consultation from District of Columbia and federal advisors.

Q: What role did the Mayor's office play in facilitating this change?
A: The BOE is an independent agency. Elected officials have an advisory and oversight role, not a decision-making role. However, the Board has reached out to the Mayor and the DC Council and greatly appreciates their support and shared concern for the safety of voters and election workers.

Q: What role did current elected officials have in this decision?
A: None.

Mail-In/Election Process

Organization

Q: Will mail-in voting become permanent and replace in-person voting as a result of this crisis?
A: No, but the BOE is prepared for its COVID-19 response measures to continue through the November election if needed. The BOE is ready and prepared for both the June 2nd Primary and the June 16th Ward 2 Special Elections.
Q: Will this affect the November election as well?

A: The BOE cannot say at this time. Decisions will be made in close consultation with the CDC and other experts. When the COVID-19 crisis ends, the BOE plans to return to the traditional way voting has occurred in the past.

Q: What is the week-of and day-of election process?

A: The BOE offers Early Voting for the June 2, 2020 Primary Election from Friday, May 22, 2020 through Monday, June 1, 2020 at over 15 early voting centers throughout the District.

Q: Will you expand voting sites if COVID-19 subsides?

A: No, for the District of Columbia June 2, 2020 Primary and the June 16, 2020 Ward 2 Special Elections, the BOE will not change back to the regular voting system regardless of when the COVID-19 response measures are relaxed.

Q: Will you cancel the election if the COVID-19 pandemic gets worse?

A: No, the BOE is not planning to cancel the June elections. The BOE is committed to one of the most important American civic rights -voting- remaining available to everyone who wishes to participate in the electoral process.

Q: Have campaigns and/or candidates been informed of these changes?

A: No, as an independent agency, the BOE does not consult with campaigns. The BOE’s focus is elections and to ensure that every vote is counted, and every voter and election worker is safe.

Q: Has the Board finalized a process for administering ballots?

A: The Board will administer ballots according to the normal absentee processes and procedures.

Q: What about voting or provisional ballot challenges?

A: Policies will not change. The Board will still institute the same highly-effective process used successfully in the past.

Q: Are there any new processes in place to ensure election integrity?

A: The same procedures that are currently in place for no-excuse absentee voting will remain in place. The BOE has used the same procedures for years. The process is already proven, and parameters in place prior to the COVID-19 response will continue to be used.

Q: How up-to-date is the DC voter database and can the BOE ensure people will understand this new change this quickly?

A: The Board will communicate the new changes as part of a public information campaign with advertising, a press conference, social media posts and emails. The plan is designed to reach people online and offline. Residents are always encouraged to contact the Board at (202) 727-2525 if they have questions.
Q: How will the system handle the influx of requests for mail-in ballots?
A: The Board will have to modify operations to receive and process the increase of mail-in ballots.

Q: Are you using a direct mail services company to assist with processing the additional ballots?
A: No, the BOE will handle all processing. The Board believes this is the best way to ensure the integrity of the election.

Q: Will you inform people to not lick their envelopes?
A: The ballot envelopes will come with an adhesive seal – licking is not necessary.

Q: Will election officials be protected from potential COVID-19 contact if voters do not follow the envelope protocol?
A: The Board will follow the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations and is in weekly contact with a special federal interagency working group of elections safety and health options.

Q: Where can I get a sticker for having voted?
A: A sticker will be included with your ballot. This year the Board will have a special Frederick Douglass design, commemorating the great abolitionist leader.

Q: Will the method for counting ballots change as a result of increased voting by mail?
A: No. The Board has a tested, proven system that can easily absorb the changes the agency is making to protect the public and election workers while ensuring every vote is counted.

Q: Does the Board have a plan in place to copy other cities across the nation?
A: No. All election officials work closely together, and the Board has been in close communication with other jurisdictions since all are facing the same challenge. Each jurisdiction will be able to support their process, according to the requirements and needs of their voters.

Q: Are there any additional risks of foreign interference in the election as a result of these new measures?
A: No. In fact, from a data security perspective, voting by mail makes foreign interference more difficult.

Q: Will the Board mail a ballot to every registered voter?
A: The Board seriously considered the option of mailing a ballot to every registered voter, (nationally referred to as Vote-by-Mail) but decided against it, despite the enhanced safety given the spread of COVID-19. The information that was provided to the Board regarding implementation of a “Vote-by-Mail” (VBM) process, suggested that the Board is far from being prepared to undertake such a challenging process with success in under three months. The information involved high level review of data and continuous conversations with other State Elections Officials, Secretaries of State, and our federal partners that are currently operating or supporting VBM as a customary practice within their jurisdictions. The intricacies associated with successfully mailing every qualified voter a ballot, are numerous, and the Board was
strongly advised against attempting such a massive undertaking for the June Elections. Such practices take years to develop and even longer to perfect. While the Board is prepared to offer ballots by mail to any voter who makes the request, the Board alone is best able to complete this request, absent extensive training and preparation with a mailing house, which would undoubtedly require more than three months of work. During this uncertain time, the Board remains committed to enfranchising all voters, and with 35 different ballots styles and 144 voting precincts, only the Board can ensure that each voter receives their correct ballot. Also, it is clear that exclusive VBM minimizes the opportunity to provide in-person voting, which may be required to provide a reasonable accommodation for voters with disabilities.

For this reason, the Board encourages each voter to request their mail-in ballot as soon as possible, and to return it to the Board quickly once received. The Board is prepared to accommodate every voter who makes such a request.

The Board will continue to explore the requirements and examine the details that are needed to develop a successful VBM program. It is the Board’s hope to be able to offer full scale VBM in the future and also provide an accessible voting option.

**Timing and Deadlines**

Q: What if a registered voter requests a mail-in ballot and does not receive it by the deadline?

A: The voter can notify the Board by calling (202) 727-2525. However, early voting centers will be open through 8:00 pm on Election Day, so even if there is an issue with a mailed ballot, your right to vote will not be taken from you.

Q: Will the city extend any timelines to accommodate people who may miss the deadlines?

A: The Board is moving as fast as safely possible to inform the public of changes and provide them ample time to adjust how they vote in light of COVID-19 safety precautions. The deadlines and election days will not change. Please request your ballot early and mail it as soon as you are ready. You are helping the community and elections workers by doing so. It’s simple, it’s secure, and it helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Q: The BOE allows for same-day voter registration. What processes have you implemented to allow voters to register to vote up until, and the day of, the election?

A: The same process as during previous voting periods is in effect. Voters can register online at www.dcboe.org or by using the Vote 4 DC mobile app. They can also register on the same day during early voting and on Election Day. Voters should be prepared to bring acceptable proofs of identification and residency, as required in previous voting periods.

Q: Exactly which elections are affected? Primary, Special, and General Election?

A: For now, only the June 2, 2020 Primary Election and the June 16, 2020 Ward 2 Special Election are affected. At this time, the Board does not know if the November 3, 2020 General Election will be conducted in the same way.
Assisting Vulnerable Populations

Q: What is the call-center process for seniors and others without internet access to request a mail-in-ballot?

A: Anyone who needs special assistance can write us a letter with the relevant information listed [here](#) and indicate where you want the ballot mailed. Currently, you can also come to the Board of Elections to complete a Ballot Request form with our assistance, but COVID-19 response measures may interfere with in-person customer service.

You can also call the Board at (202) 727-2525 to request an application, or you can go to a vote center. If you know of a person who needs additional assistance, you can complete a request for them [as long as the voter SIGNS the document](#) you prepare. Voting is for everyone who is eligible, and the Board stands ready for those who might need a little extra help with registering or voting.

Q: How will the homeless and other vulnerable populations with no fixed address request a ballot?

A: The BOE has processes in place to serve the homeless population, just as it serves anyone else who wishes to vote. Persons experiencing homelessness can simply have the ballot mailed to any fixed address that receives mail on their behalf for services such as food, shelter, or other social services.

Q: How do newly incarcerated or homeless people request a mail-in ballot?

A: The same way they always have – by phone, fax, online, or in person.

Q: Can I request a ballot for others (family members, people with disabilities, seniors, etc.)?

A: Yes, but the Board must have the signature of the voter making the request.

Q: How do you plan to reach people without internet access to inform them?

A: Mass public messaging and a media campaign that extends beyond the internet will reach people who may not be online.

Physical Locations

Q: How will this campaign maintain the CDC recommendation of congregating in groups no larger than 10 people?

A: While adhering to the CDC recommendation will be a challenge, the BOE plans to have more early voting centers to help with social distancing, using mail-in ballots to reduce the risk of residents contracting and spreading the coronavirus by voting in person, and strict CDC-recommended cleaning protocols for voting sites.

Q: Will voting machines be spaced out?

A: Yes, machines will be spaced out.
Q: For the physical locations which remain, how were those determined and why were they chosen?

A: The Board will continue to use the early voting centers as used in previous elections. The Board is trying to acquire additional sites that are larger in order to accommodate more voters while still practicing effective social distancing.

Q: What safety measures will be taken at those locations besides your COVID-19 preparations?

A: The BOE will have Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and security officers on call.

Q: Does the BOE expect a large influx of voters at the limited locations and will there be extra staffing on hand to enforce anti-COVID measures?

A: This situation is uncharted territory for the BOE as well as election officials nationwide. The Board will do a major push for using mail-in ballots but will be prepared to serve voters if they show up to vote at centers as well. However, the Board strongly advises voters to use mail-in ballots for the June 2, 2020 Primary Election and the June 16, 2020 Ward 2 Special Election. Please help the Board keep everyone safe and ensure that every vote is counted.

Q: If the city does expect high numbers of voters at these locations, what input do other agencies like MPD have in securing and processing these locations?

A: The Board always has MPD and other security officers on call. The Board does not currently foresee any need for additional measures beyond the agency’s COVID-19 response.

Q: How does the new approach compare to the regular election process? How many polling stations and early voting centers were there previously? How many do you have now?

A: Previously, the BOE had 144 precincts open on election day, and 15 early voting centers open for a week. For the June 2020 elections, the 144 precincts will remain closed, but 5 new, larger early voting centers will be added.

Announcing the Change to the Public/Media

Q: Where can I find information about the new process?

A: The Board is the most reliable source of information for any changes with the June 2, 2020 Primary Election and the June 16, 2020 Ward 2 Special Election. Information will be available on www.dcboe.org at the Vote Safe DC page, on social media, as part of the media campaign, in emails for many voters, the Voter Guide, and via radio/television stations.

Q: What are you doing to combat misinformation about this process?

A: The Board plans to get in front of misinformation or disinformation and correct any story as soon as possible. If you are reading information that did not come from the BOE, please check here to make sure you are not accidentally passing along bad information.

Q: Who is the official spokesperson for this change?

A: The Board Chair Michael Bennett made the initial announcement, and LaDawne White is the official spokesperson.
Q: What is the process for securing information or interviews from the media?
A: Please contact and coordinate with LaDawne White. Ms. White can be reached at media@dcboe.org.

Q: What is the city’s process for informing residents of the change and what’s the budgetary impact of this effort?
A: The Board will lead all public communication and education efforts regarding the change. The Board does not know the full budgetary impact yet. However, the Board has sufficient resources to address this issue effectively and appropriately.

Q: Is there anything the Chairman of the Board would like residents of the District of Columbia to know?
A: The BOE is dedicated to providing voters with elections that ensure public safety, so that everyone who is eligible and chooses to vote can do so, and to ensure that every vote is counted. The BOE is doing everything in its power to accommodate voters in this challenging time, but also asks the public to support its efforts. Please get the word out about the Board’s #VoteSafeDC campaign, which informs voters of changes and how to cast their ballot by mail. It is simple, safe and secure – and it will help save lives.