



Secretary of State

Kim Wyman

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Dear Local Officials:

As you may have heard, county election officials from across the state joined me Tuesday evening in asking the governor to use his emergency authority to cancel the April Special Election. Prior to becoming the Secretary of State, I worked in county government for 27 years as both a county election director and auditor, so I deeply understand the potential effect this request has on your jurisdiction. This request is unprecedented in our state's history. So, too, is the current COVID-19 threat. We would not have asked for this cancellation if we believed we could overcome the uncertain and real impacts the virus could have on the ability to conduct your special election safely.

While we await a formal decision by the governor, I remind you there are two remaining dates available this year to conduct your special election — August 4 and November 3. As of this writing, 12 of the original 36 jurisdictions across the state proactively made the decision to rescind their resolutions for the April election. We encourage you to work with your county auditor to explore these options for your district, and to consider taking formal action as soon as possible to cancel your April special election and move it to one of the aforementioned dates.

I would like to take a moment to share with you the reasons we made the request to cancel the election now, and explain some of the risks of moving forward during this uncertain period of time.

You may be wondering why – in a vote-by-mail environment – we would ask the governor to cancel this election. Our voters can vote at home and drop their ballot in their mail box, all without interacting with another person. What's invisible to most people is our county election officials rely on a large number of processes and people to prepare, conduct, and certify an election. Administration of an election begins about four weeks before Election Day and work continues for another two weeks following. As of today, counties have not ordered ballots or supplies for the election but must do so soon to meet certain election deadlines in the coming days. Each day we wait to cancel results in counties moving forward with the election and incurring increased costs for your jurisdiction, whether the election is conducted or not.

The spread of COVID-19 is adversely impacting staffing levels and work environments, leading to statewide implementation of social distancing, quarantines, and workplace closures. Reduced availability of personal protective equipment and supplies is also greatly affecting plans county auditors must make to execute this election. Courthouse and school closures across the state have already taken effect, as well as mandatory shelter-in-place orders in parts of the country. The possibility of a mandatory shutdown of courthouses or restrictions on individuals' movements in geographic regions of our state remains high.

In terms of facilities, county auditors and election vendors have space constraints that often require staff to work in close quarters to support an election. Though staffing levels can vary between counties, all it may take is one staff member's exposure to COVID-19 to result in the suspension of the entire election operation for 14 days or more. This is also true of the vendors supporting the process. This could happen at any time in any election office or vendor operation across the state during the six-week election period. In this scenario, the county auditor may be forced to seek relief from the court by requesting cancellation of the election, well after significant resources have been invested in the election.

One final staffing issue we considered is counties rely on a mix of full-time and temporary employees to conduct elections. Most of these workers are considered high risk to exposure (60 years old or older) and we are concerned about protecting them during this pandemic. The health and safety of our staff and voters is paramount. It's imperative they follow health recommendations now so they are healthy enough to conduct the statewide primary and general elections later this year.

I have attached two photos of workers in two county election departments from past elections. These pictures are representative samples of the work environments across the state and demonstrate what is at risk in the April election.

I encourage you to reach out to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction or the Governor's Office to see if there are any relief measures that could be made available to you in response to this cancellation request during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions, please reach out to me at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kim Wyman
Secretary of State