

IMPORTANT POINTS REGARDING THE UPCOMING PRIMARY ELECTION DURING A PANDEMIC

- Counties are on the front lines of the pandemic and absolutely need to be prepared for the worst-case scenario.
- Regardless of how long this pandemic continues, counties must do their citizens as well as the election justice by planning ahead and putting protections in place. A mail ballot election ensures safety, a good voter turnout, reliability, and the instills faith in the voters that their counties can continue to provide the essential services of public health and safety.
- **Health & Safety is a Primary Function of Local Government:**
 - The health and safety of the public, election judges (who are primarily of the demographic of concern for COVID-19 mortality), and county employees running the election are not only a huge priority for county, it's the county's function as a form of government.
- **Election Judges:**
 - Counties are losing election judges rapidly, as they are primarily of the demographic of concern for COVID-19 mortality (they essentially don't want to be election judges at the polls and be exposed to the virus).
 - On this same point, many counties are having difficulties purchasing protective supplies for the judges, like hand sanitizer, wipes, and protective masks (which are difficult to get right now altogether across the US)
 - Counties are losing their legacy election judges (for reasons stated previously regarding) and are not comfortable sending freshly trained folks out into the field without any experience when it comes to the higher-level election judge tasks that the legacy election judges usually do.
 - Election judges are paid staff members on election day. Because they come from the primary demographic of concern for significant COVID-19 mortality, placing them in positions of the greatest community exposure as employees of local government is unconscionable.
- **Directives:** The Governor is issuing Directives to slow the spread of COVID-19. The Governor has the authority to issue the Directives he is issuing under section [10-3-104, MCA](#); Executive Orders [2-2020](#) and [3-2020](#); Montana Constitution, Art. VI, [Section 4](#) and [Section 13](#); §§ [10-3-103, -302, and -305, MCA](#); §§ [50-1-202, -203, and -204, MCA](#); and all other applicable provisions of state and federal law.
 - The [March 15, 2020 Directive](#) closed schools and nursing homes;
 - The [March 24, 2020 Directive](#) extended closures and mandates social distancing; and
 - The [March 27, 2020 Directive](#) requires Montanans to stay home and temporarily closes all nonessential businesses and operations.
 - No one knows how long this will continue; it is the county's job to be prepared.
 - Issues counties are experiencing under the current Directives, which make polling place elections impossible:
 - Polling places are dwindling.

- Election judge trainings are being cancelled.
 - All [CDC](#), [federal](#), [state](#), and [county](#) guidance is to have 6-feet of space between each person and/or stay away from people altogether (this is now mandated by the Directive listed above), and that would be next to impossible in a polling place election.
- **Time is Passing:**
 - No one knows how long this situation will persist, and counties must be prepared. In order for a county to meet all of the requirements and needs of an election, preparations must begin no later than 75 days prior. It takes almost all of those 75 days to conduct an election when there isn't a pandemic. As of March 27th, Montana is 67 days out.
 - Keeping the timeline and having a mail election will ensure a good voter turnout and instills faith in the voters; it is at least SOMETHING that remains consistent and absolute, and because of that, it also eliminates voter confusion.
- **Supplies:** Extra mailing supplies, folded ballots, etc. need to be ordered IMMEDIATELY if the primary election is mail ballot.
 - **ES&S:** The company who provides Montana's counting machines and new ballot interface devices/ExpressVotes is worried about the training they conduct at the county offices in regard to using the new machines (ExpressVotes)—their travel is limited due to flights being cancelled. This means a rush of training around the US all at the same time (election judges would also need to be trained on the machines).
- **If the County Deems that the Primary is to be a POLL Election...**
 - Counties will need to each pass a resolution relocating polling places due to the emergency (as previously mentioned, several polls are located in nursing homes and schools, and those need to be moved).
 - Counties will need to provide notice to voters about polling place relocations, which needs to go out in April, so voters have the option to request an absentee ballot instead.
 - Counties are losing several polling places due to the afore mentioned directives; this will lead to consolidation; therefore, if the county proceeds with a polling place election, they will be putting larger groups of people in closer proximity. These people (many of which are of the demographic of concern for COVID-19 mortality) will be in closer proximity to our election judges, who are primarily in the demographic of concern for COVID-19 mortality. The county needs to protect the people and conduct an election.
 - Several election judge trainings are being cancelled, because they consist of large crowds of people primarily of the demographic of concern.
 - Training sessions will need to be remote, so those materials must still be developed, and COVID-19 specific instructions need to be added.
 - Counties will need time to find election judges who are willing to serve during the pandemic. (**This will be a significant hurdle, considering the vast majority of Montana's election judges are in the primary demographic of concern for COVID-19 mortality.**)