

# Gov. Pritzker Signs Legislation to Expand Vote by Mail, Promote Safe Participation in the 2020 Election

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Springfield, Ill. – To ensure safe and active participation in the 2020 general election during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Governor JB Pritzker signed SB 1863 and HB 2238 into law today to provide vote by mail (VBM) applications to all recent voters in Illinois. The legislation also expands early voting hours at permanent polling places, improves the signature verification process and makes election day a state holiday.

“In the face of a pandemic, massive economic upheaval, and renewed calls for racial justice, it’s more important than ever that Illinoisans can hold accountable a truly representative and transparent government – and that means ensuring all eligible residents can wield their right to vote in a way that doesn’t risk their personal health,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Sending vote by mail applications to residents who have participated in recent elections will allow more people to exercise that right from the safety of their own homes and help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. I applaud Leader Kelly Burke, Senator Julie Morrison, the House Democratic Women’s Caucus and leaders in the General Assembly for working to ensure Illinoisans can continue to exercise their right to vote in the upcoming general election.”

In anticipation of the continued need for social distancing measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, vote by mail may be the safest method to cast a ballot in November.

Under the new law, local election offices must mail or email vote by mail ballot applications and the VBM timeline to voters who cast a ballot in the 2018 general election, the 2019 consolidated election or the 2020 general primary election, including voters who registered or changed addresses after the primary election. Voters who submit their application for a VBM ballot by October 1 will receive their VBM ballot by October 6.

The legislation requires the Illinois State Board of Elections (ISBE) to:

- Post an application for a vote by mail ballot on its website;

- Modify the online voter registration system to allow a new registrant to apply for a VBM ballot when completing the online registration;
- Provide notice to each election authority about what it must do to comply with the new law and;
- Adopt emergency rules to provide reimbursement for expenses related to the 2020 general election incurred as a result of COVID-19 and the new requirements.

To improve the signature verification process, the legislation raises the standard for rejecting a VBM ballot. The election authority will be required to appoint a bipartisan panel of three election judges to verify voters' signature and the validity of the ballot. Currently, only a single election judge makes this determination.

In an effort to prevent overcrowding at the polls on election day, expanding early voting hours will help ensure election authorities are able to comply with the Illinois Department of Health (IDPH) safety and health guidance. Permanent branch polling places are required to be open from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the weekends and holidays. The legislation permits the use of curbside voting, in which voters can fill out the ballot outside of the polling place. The bill also authorizes election authorities to establish additional early voting hours for voters whom COVID-19 presents increased health risks.

To further promote safety on election day, the legislation requires local election authorities to establish a central voting site where anyone who lives in the jurisdiction can vote, regardless of their precinct. Additionally, the bill makes election day a holiday for all government offices, except election authorities, K-12 schools, and post-secondary institutions governed by the State Universities Civil Service Act. The state has already established election day as a holiday for state employees.

The trailer bill, HB 2238, would require collection boxes to be locked and opened only by election authorities. It also requires ISBE to establish additional guidelines for the security of these sites.

"On behalf of our 1.7 million members, AARP IL commends Gov. Pritzker for ensuring that all eligible voters can cast their ballots safely," said Bob Gallo, State Director for AARP Illinois. "The bill signed today offers innovative solutions and timely measures that allows older Illinois residents to choose the option that best keeps them safe and healthy during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic."

"Ensuring voters in Illinois can safely participate in elections is a cornerstone of our Democracy," said Gretchen DeJaynes, Chair of the Illinois Association of County

Clerks and Records Legislative Committee. “Expanding vote by mail will allow more people to vote safely and county clerks and election authorities across the state are working to implement this important legislation.”

“With our current public health situation, many people feel uncertain about the prospect of having to vote in person,” said Sen. Linda Holmes (D-Aurora), Assistant Majority Leader and Senate Democratic Women’s Caucus Chairwoman. “We just marked the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote, which boosted participation in elections. Now if we can provide safety and comfort to anyone with an at-risk condition to be able to vote by mail, it will be another step forward in increasing voter turnout so everyone can make their voice heard.”

“The COVID 19 pandemic has created many challenges, but participation in the November election should not be one of them,” said Rep. Kelly Burke (D-Evergreen Park), Assistant Majority Leader. “Just as we have taken precautions to make shopping, traveling, and other everyday tasks safer, we must also take precautions and make adjustments to ensure everyone can safely exercise their right to vote.”

“The state and nation are facing unprecedented threats to fair and open elections and the Illinois House Democratic Women’s Caucus is committed to protecting the voting rights of all Americans,” said Rep. Deb Conroy (D-Villa Park), House Democratic Women’s Caucus Chairwoman. “I’d like to thank Governor Pritzker for signing this legislation today to ensure everyone in Illinois has fair access to their right to vote.”

“If you’re eligible to vote, you should be able to do so safely and securely. No one should have to worry about jeopardizing their health to practice their civil duty,” said Sen. Julie Morrison (D-Deerfield). “It is vital that no eligible voter — regardless of age or health — end up disenfranchised by the current health crisis. More voters will be able to participate in a very important aspect of their citizenry — their right to vote — because we have a plan in place to allow them to do so safely. We must be prepared, because we don’t know how safe it will be for people to be this fall.”

“As a member of the Elections Workgroup, I would like to thank the Governor for his commitment to strengthening the integrity of our election system in Illinois,” said Rep. LaToya Greenwood (D-East St. Louis). “This legislation will create broader access to voting and enhance participation for everyone in the electoral process.”

“With the uncertainty the COVID-19 pandemic brings, the Illinois House Democratic Women’s Caucus wanted to make sure people are able to vote, without risking their health to do so,” said Rep. Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville). “I worked with members

from across the state to come up with a plan to both educate voters about and streamline the vote by mail process. On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I thank Governor Pritzker for signing the important legislation.”

The new laws take effect immediately.