



HERB J. WESSON, JR.
COUNCILMEMBER, 10TH DISTRICT

April 16, 2020

Honorable Alex Padilla
California Secretary of State
1500 11th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Padilla:

RE: 2020 General Election & In-Person Voting During COVID-19 Pandemic

I write to you today in support of many of the initial recommendations of your Working Group report – specifically the proposal to send all voters in California a vote-by-mail ballot and your plans to dedicate additional funds to a public education program about election procedures and to provide additional resources to counties for additional election staffing needs.

But I am also writing to express my strong and fundamental opposition to the Working Group's recommendation that the state legal requirements for in-person voting be replaced with an alternative plan of establishing in-person voting "goals," giving local officials discretion to establish their own in-person voting standards and potentially disenfranchise hundreds of thousands, if not millions of California voters.

On the contrary, we need to increase vote center options across the state, and particular in urban centers like Los Angeles. As you well know, our March primary elections were nothing short of a disaster. Folks waited hours in line - a form of voter suppression in itself - to cast a vote. It was unacceptable and disconcerting. These elections highlighted that there's a significant desire from people to physically get out to the polls, and government should not be discouraging that in any way. And as we've seen in states like Wisconsin in the last several weeks, whether we like it or not, folks will still get out to the polls in the midst of a public health crisis. So while we should encourage people to vote by mail, it's also our responsibility to make sure Californians can safely exercise their right to vote in person in November.

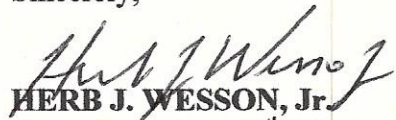
The proposed ratio of 1 vote center for 20,000 voters is woefully inadequate. It does not take into account the low-income, racially diverse, low homeownership and high-density communities who disproportionately vote in person at their polling places. These are areas, some of which I represent, with the highest late voter turnout and those who are most likely to have issues with

their vote-by-mail ballots. Reducing the number of vote centers available will not only make it harder for historically disadvantaged communities to vote, it will also make it more dangerous to voters due to longer wait times and lines, increasing their risk to exposure of COVID-19 and having the exact opposite effect of your and the Working Group's intentions.

I know that you only have the best intentions for our state and would never intentionally implement plans that would disenfranchise Californians. But this recommendation from the Working Group would do exactly that. I urge you to do just the opposite and expand the voting centers available by upholding the state's local requirements and expanding upon them by requiring a voting center for every 5,000 residents.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



HERB J. WESSON, Jr.
Councilmember, 10th District

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