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Raffensperger Encourages Absentee Ballot Voting as COVID-19 Precautions Result in Long Wait Times at the Ballot Box

(ATLANTA)-After the first day of in-person early voting in Georgia, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger is encouraging Georgians to vote absentee by mail to protect their health and limit wait times at the ballot box. The demands of social distancing and other COVID-19 related health precautions has lowered the capacity polling locations around the state have for in-person voting, and has increased wait times for Georgians looking to cast their ballots in person. Additionally, many absentee ballots are still on the way to Georgia voters who requested them. When these Georgians opt to vote in person, their absentee ballot must be cancelled at the polling site, an extra step that further slows down the voting process.

“Considering the health risks posed by COVID-19, Georgians should seriously consider submitting an absentee ballot by mail for the June 9 elections,” said Raffensperger. “While we understand the Georgia tradition of in-person voting and look forward to returning to normal in-person voting in future elections, the extra precautions necessary to preserve voter and poll worker health during the pandemic will result in long wait times and an increased health risk that could be avoided through absentee ballots for this election.”

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are taking extra precautions to protect the health and safety of our poll workers and of Cobb County voters,” said Cobb County Elections Supervisor Janine Eveler. “These necessary steps can result in longer wait times than normal so we are encouraging voters to submit absentee ballots by mail if they can.”

“Fulton County elections officials are working to protect the health of our voters and poll workers, as we try to limit the length of wait times for in person voters,” said Fulton County Elections Supervisor Richard Barron. “Fulton County voters should consider submitting absentee ballots by mail from the safety of their own homes.”

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began to disrupt elections in the state, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has encouraged Georgia voters to submit absentee ballots by mail for the June 9 elections. Earlier this year, Raffensperger sent absentee ballot request forms to all 6.9 million active Georgia voters. Georgia’s voters were able to return those forms either by mail or by email.

Almost 1.5 million Georgians have submitted a request for absentee ballots for the upcoming election with over 1 million absentee ballots already sent out to Georgia voters. Each absentee ballot mailing has a bar code allowing the Secretary of State’s office to track it as it moves through the state’s postal

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system and to the voter's mailbox. This allows the Secretary's office to ensure that the ballots get where they are supposed to go.

Georgia voters have already returned 400,000 absentee ballots with three weeks to go until Election Day.

The large influx of absentee ballot voters will lower the burden on polling places that are working hard to keep wait times short but also to ensure social distancing and necessary health measures are observed. Considering most poll workers are in a high-risk group and therefore particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, there are fewer volunteers available to work the polls. Social distancing means fewer voting machines at each location and the need for extra sanitation increases the time between each voter and, therefore, the length of wait times. Voters who have requested absentee ballots but choose to vote in-person need to cancel their absentee location at the polling location, adding an extra step that further slows down the voting process.

To mitigate these concerns, Secretary Raffensperger has called on Georgia voters to submit an absentee ballot by mail or in drop-boxes for counties that have made it available. Counties looking to open an absentee ballot drop box can apply for a grant from the Secretary's office to help cover the cost, in addition to applying for funds for extra sanitary supplies and election infrastructure.

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