

Madam Chairwoman and members, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the important work we are doing in Louisiana in these unprecedented times to ensure all voters have the opportunity to vote safely in a fair and honest election.

Unfortunately, Louisiana is no stranger to natural disaster and we have faced crises around election time before, such as in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the surrounding area, or when Hurricane Gustav hit southeast Louisiana, followed by Hurricane Ike in the southwest, in 2008. When a storm hit Louisiana, neighboring states and the nation as a whole rallied around us and helped us rebuild and recover. Covid-19 has been a great equalizer, with a reach to almost every corner of the globe, and negating the ability for unaffected to respond. However, never before have we had to deal with the “perfect storm” of election issues as we are now-cyber threats, election meddling attempts from foreign adversaries, and now COVID-19.

Our previous experience with natural disaster has better prepared Louisiana to adjust election processes and procedures in a way other states cannot. Louisiana law allows for me, as Secretary of State, to certify that an emergency exists and request to the Governor that our elections be postponed. In March, we became the first state to change our election dates from April and May to June and July, and later postponed further to July and August. Louisiana law further requires that I submit an emergency election plan to the legislature, where it must be approved by both House and Senate Governmental Affairs Committees, the full legislature, and agreed to by the Governor. Immediately following our decision to delay our spring elections, my staff began work on an emergency plan that would provide for safe elections in the midst of a global pandemic. The emergency election plan, agreed to by our Democratic Governor and approved by a majority Republican legislature with bipartisan support, establishes the following:

- An additional six days of in-person early voting. While in-person early voting normally takes place over a week-long period, we added an

additional six days to provide for the necessary social distancing measures needed.

- An emergency COVID-19 absentee ballot application. Currently, Louisiana allows for all voters sixty-five and older to enroll in our “65 and Older Program,” which sends those voters an absentee ballot during every election. Additionally, we regularly allow for excuse-required absentee voting. This emergency application covers those at higher risk for COVID-19, those subject to quarantine, those experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or those caring for an individual subject to quarantine.
- Personal Protective Equipment at every polling site. Hand sanitizer will be provided to voters, screens and other equipment will be regularly wiped, and poll workers will be given masks and gloves.

Our emergency election plan is a TEMPORARY response to a global pandemic. This plan would be applicable only for the July and August elections. Any changes to the processes for the fall election would require the same process of submitting an emergency election plan with legislative and gubernatorial approval. Our state has benefited greatly from flexibility; having the ability to adapt to whatever crisis our state faces has allowed us to tailor our response to the situation at hand.

In our state’s legislative session, we recently killed legislation that would hamper our ability to respond to crises. In a similar way, we as states must fight against federal attempts to mandate how we run our elections under the guise of charitable appropriations. Receiving one-time funds to run elections during an unprecedented crisis at the expense of radically changing our election system is a trade-off we are not willing to make. We will gladly accept federal dollars with no strings or political motivations attached, and we would prefer to not have to come up with state matching dollars in a time of such economic turmoil.

As the chief election officer for the state, I am tasked with overseeing elections, and I cannot cede control of our elections to politicians thousands of miles away. I am accountable to Louisianians, and they

expect me to run elections in a safe, fair and honest manner that works for our state. I look forward to your questions.