



Statement from the Honorable John H. Merrill
Alabama Secretary of State

Before the Committee on House Administration
United State House of Representatives

June 4, 2020

Chairperson Zofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee on House Administration, thank you for the opportunity to address you today and discuss the importance of election administration and how we can work together to protect the 2020 Election Cycle and beyond.

My name is John Merrill, and I have the privilege of serving as Alabama's 53rd Secretary of State.

Since I was elected to this office on January 19, 2015, we have changed the paradigm for voting in the State of Alabama. My team and I have shattered every record in the history of the state for voter registration and voter participation through countless photo voter identification and voter registration events and campaigns. Through working with notable Alabamians, local officials, interested agencies, key communicators, and community leaders, we have worked to register more than 1,517,888 new voters since January 19, 2015, bringing the state's total number of registered voters to 3,594,695.

Additionally, we have broken almost every record for voter participation in the last five major elections. On March 1, 2016, more than 1.25 million Alabamians voted, breaking every record in the history of the state for participation in a Presidential Primary. On November 8, 2016, more than 2.1 million Alabamians voted, breaking every record in the history of the state for participation in a Presidential General Election. On December 12, 2017, more than 1.3 million Alabamians voted and participated in the Special U.S. Senate Election, and on November 6, 2018, more than 1.7 million Alabamians voted, again breaking every record in the history of the state for a Midterm General Election. Recently, on March 3, 2020, almost 1.2 million Alabamians voted amid the nationwide COVID-19 outbreak and severe weather concerns, coming very close to breaking our state's record for turnout during a Presidential Primary.

These numbers prove the importance of participating in the electoral process to Alabamians, who have had a long history of dealing with oppressive voting laws, which were, at one time, written to reduce or eliminate minority participation completely in the elections process.

We have since worked to see that it is easier than ever to vote in Alabama through providing free photo voter ID's, electronic voter registration through our mobile app "Vote for Alabama" and on our website AlabamaVotes.gov, annual visits to all 67 of Alabama's counties to ensure each and every eligible U.S. citizen that is a resident of the State of Alabama is registered to vote and has a government-issued photo ID, and various other initiatives.

Through working with members of the Alabama Legislature, we have preserved the right for every eligible Alabamian to participate in the electoral process while reducing the opportunity for fraud to be committed.

The political climate in Alabama is much different from that of New York, California, or Colorado. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that states are given the opportunity to run their

own elections – free from federal interference because what works for one state may not work for all.

Alabamians, who have long enjoyed the opportunity to visit the polls on Election Day, take great pride in showing up in person to vote. As witnessed in this year’s Presidential Primary Election, during growing concerns over COVID-19, Alabamians still showed up in almost record-breaking numbers. Currently, on average 96% of those Alabamians which choose to vote, vote in person on Election Day.

Our office is greatly appreciative of the recent funds allocated by Congress to protect the 2020 Election Cycle. In our state, these funds will be used to provide sanitation supplies, personal protective equipment, and professional cleaning services to ensure all 1,980 polling precincts in the state will be safe and sanitary for voters, poll workers, and anyone else involved in the elections process. Funds will also be used to reimburse Absentee Election Managers for increased work due to the lengthened absentee voting period we have offered our voters, as well as increased pay for poll workers due to their expanded role in ensuring the safety and sanitization of their polling places.

Election officials at the state, county, and local level are working around the clock to see that voters in our state are able to participate in the electoral process without comprising their health or well-being.

State law authorizes the Secretary of State to adopt an emergency rule related to absentee voting during a declared state of emergency as declared by our state or by the federal government. Typically, Alabamians must select an excuse on the absentee ballot application when attempting to cast an absentee ballot. Under this statute, I have encouraged anyone who is concerned about contracting or spreading COVID-19 to apply for and cast an absentee ballot for the July 14 Primary Runoff Election through selecting the box on the absentee ballot application which reads as follows:

“I have a physical illness or infirmity which prevents my attendance at the polls.
[ID REQUIRED]”

In doing so, we are protecting the opportunity for every eligible Alabamian to participate in the elections process.

However, efforts we have recently witnessed to implement vote-by-mail nationwide would radically change the elections process in Alabama and numerous other states.

These efforts would significantly increase the opportunity for fraud to be committed in an election. Last month, we witnessed thousands of absentee ballots sent to inactive voters in Clark County, Nevada. I respectfully ask that you consider the thousands of ballot envelopes piling up in post offices or outside homes, apartments, and other facilities. In 2016, 83 ballots were sent to

one California address housing just two people. In Alabama, prior to the passage and implementation of our reform absentee voting law, requiring a photo ID to be submitted along with the absentee ballot application, we witnessed 109 absentee ballots sent to the mother of a mayoral candidate in Brighton, Alabama in 2016 and another instance in the same year in which 119 absentee ballots were mailed to an abandoned home in Wilcox County, Alabama.

It should also be noted that of the six voter fraud convictions in Alabama, five have been related to absentee voting.

It has also been reported, through data collected by the Election Assistance Commission, that between 2012 and 2018, 28.3 million mail-in ballots went unaccounted for, which equates to one in five of all absentee or mail-in ballots.

These are just a few of the examples that prove the increased likelihood for voter fraud to be committed during mail-in elections.

Lastly, I ask that you consider two major components of mail-in voting – cost and supplies. Currently, the administration for one Election Cycle (Primary, Runoff, and General) in our state is \$16.5 million, whereas the administration for a full mail-in Election Cycle is almost \$60 million. In addition, there is an extreme limited supply of resources needed to conduct an all-mail election, making this nationwide push extremely difficult if at all possible.

Alabama, where, on average, 4% of voters participate in the election through casting an absentee ballot, is not prepared for such changes, and I respectfully ask that you consider the millions of Americans who will be negatively impacted by such significant changes to the voting process.

I thank you for your time today and for your work to serve the people of our great country.