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ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

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July 22, 2020

Marisel A. Hernandez
Chair
City of Chicago Board of Election Commissioners
69 West Washington Street, Suites 600/800
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Dear Ms. Hernandez,

As Ranking Member of the Committee on House Administration in the U.S. House of Representatives, which has broad jurisdiction over election issues, I write to you because of the election administration issues that plagued your city's March 17th primary election. As primary elections conclude across the country, I have identified the city of Chicago as one where voters are likely to face significant hurdles voting in the November 3rd general election and where the risk of failure is simply too high. Included in this letter are references to the issues identified as well as oversight questions aimed at reassuring me and, more importantly, the voters of Chicago that they will not be disenfranchised again.

a. *Voter confusion regarding mail-in voting versus in-person voting:* I understand that there was disagreement between the Chicago Board of Elections ("Board") and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker's office on how to best administer this past spring's primary election. Reports indicate that the Board requested to move to an entiterly vote-by-mail system but Governor Pritzker's office rejected the idea and suggested that the Board made "politically charged accusations." This public disagreement weakens public confidence in the city's elections and serves to confuse voters about what their options will be this fall. This is best seen in the near-record low turnout in the primary election.

    1. What authority does the Governor of Illinois have to unilaterally limit voting in the city of Chicago to only vote by mail?
    2. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council (GCC), and Sector Coordinating Council's (SCC) Joint Covid Working Group has produced a series of documents, available on the Election Assistance Commission's website, meant to provide guidance to state, local, tribal, and territorial election officials on how to administer and secure election infrastructure in light of the Covid-19 epidemic. Included in these documents is a "Vote by Mail/Absentee Voting Timeline"[1] which provides recommendations and a timeline for

[1] *Vote by Mail Timeline*, Election Assistance Commission (2020), https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/vbm/VBMProjectTimeline.pdf.

ramping up vote by mail operations. Using this timeline as a reference point, please provide the Committee an update on whether Chicago is taking these recommendations and if Chicago is meeting the proposed timeline.

3. What steps is the Board taking to maximize voter turnout this fall, and avoid the debacle that took place in the spring?
4. Has the Board eased relations with the Governor's office to a degree that both offices are collaborating on efforts to manage an efficient and safe General Election? What steps have both offices taken to date?

b. *Voter confusion regarding in-person voting locations:* Reports also indicate that several polling locations were closed at the last minute during the primary election, which led to the delay of other polling locations. The Board indicated last March that 50 precincts were in the process of being moved, but the exact number was not known at the time. As you know, last-minute polling location closures or delays frustrates a voter's right to vote. Some voters have been voting at the same location for years and closing that location could have the effect of denying an individual's right to vote.

    1. What was the total number of polling location closures during the 2020 primary election?
    2. How will the Board ensure that the number of polling places remains constant in the 2020 general election?
    3. Has the Board identified polling places to replace certain polling locations, such as condominiums, that may be closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

c. *Failure to adequately recruit election day volunteers:* Across the country, a shortage of poll workers threatens this fall's General Election. Many poll workers in Chicago are city employees, but many others are local volunteers who serve out of love for their city, state, and democracy. However, due to the pandemic, many poll workers who are members of at-risk populations have decided to stay home this year for fear of contracting the virus at their duty station.

    1. Does the Board have a plan to recruit poll workers who are members of non-at-risk populations?
    2. What is the approximate number of poll workers that were unable to serve during the primary election?
    3. Does the Board have an estimate as to the number of poll workers the city of Chicago will be short on Election Day 2020?

Ahead of the 2020 general election, it is imperative the city of Chicago address these issues to ensure voters are again not disenfranchised. I firmly believe every voter who wants to vote must have the opportunity to do so. It is also critical that the American people have confidence in their elections, and to this end, the issues seen in the city of Chicago are simply unacceptable. It is my hope that these oversight questions will begin to restore that confidence. Please submit answers to these questions to my office by August 14, 2020. If you have any questions, please contact my staff at the Committee on House Administration at (202) 225-8281.

Sincerely,



Rodney Davis
Ranking Member