



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Fitzgerald Calls for Primary Election to be Conducted by Mail

PITTSBURGH – County Executive Rich Fitzgerald today called for an expansion of the state's emergency declaration to allow the county to send a ballot to every registered voter in Allegheny County so that the June 2, 2020 primary election may be conducted by mail. The action is being taken upon the recommendation of Dr. Debra Bogen, Director of the Allegheny County Health Department.

“Holding an in-person election in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic would be, in and of itself, a disaster,” said Fitzgerald. “We are not going to have enough staff to work the election and asking elected and appointed poll workers to work flies in the face of what we’ve been asking everyone in this county to do since mid-March. Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy, but in-person voting would jeopardize this community and potentially disenfranchise voters who would be afraid to come to the polls.”

As of this morning, there are over 800 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Allegheny County. Due to community spread and limited capacity for testing, there is also a presumption that there are many other positives cases in the county. As the testing capacity increases, so will the number of cases. As a result, Dr. Bogen and Health Department officials have urged the public to help stop the spread by staying home, washing their hands often, and staying at least 6 feet away from others if they do have to go out. These are all precautions that cannot be followed with an in-person primary election.

“Voting in person could put our most vulnerable populations at risk; those who are most at risk of serious infection,” said Bogen. “Even if those individuals come out to vote, there is no way to remain physically distant at our polling places. This concern includes the majority of our poll workers, as working on election day would be unsafe for them.”

The state oversees the electoral process, but it is the counties that are required to complete the day-to-day operations and conduct elections. Even with recent actions by the legislature allowing for the consolidation of polling places, the Elections Division would still need to provide over a thousand poll workers to staff locations. Additional staff and resources would be needed to provide for troubleshooting and overall elections operations.

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