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The November 3, 2020 election is 125 days from today. Early voting begins on October 19. As the Pulaski County Clerk and Voter Registrar, our office is working in preparation for that election.

Last week Arkansas Secretary of State John Thurston publicly recognized the concern many Arkansas voters have expressed about the safety of voting in person this fall considering the COVID-19 health crisis. I, too, am confident that current election law allows all registered voters in Arkansas to request and vote by absentee ballot in the November 3 election.

To ensure a smooth transition as county clerks pivot to meet a significant increase in absentee voting, we need greater assistance from the Secretary of State. We need the CARES Act funding and other resources to adequately equip all 75 Arkansas counties. An unavoidable uptick in voting by absentee ballot will take an undue toll on all county clerks' offices.

The governor has discussed absentee voting many times and through executive orders has granted no-excuse absentee for the run-off and special elections that have occurred throughout the state since our primary election in March. However, more action is needed.

The governor must emergency funds to adequately supplement the needs of all 75 counties to conduct a safe November election. Adequate means funding additional costs for postage, printing, processing, canvassing, and tabulating absentee requests and completed ballots. Promises of personal protective equipment are welcomed and needed, but we also need to prepare for the large numbers of Arkansas voters who choose the safe alternative of voting by absentee ballot.

A *FiveThirtyEight* survey of election officials from eight states and the District of Columbia showed a 30-93 percent change from 2016 in voting method from in-person to absentee. How would the voting method change here in Arkansas?

In Pulaski County over 251,000 Arkansans are registered to vote. If turnout trends continue, like they have for the past three Presidential elections, an estimated 160,000 or more will cast a ballot in November. We receive approximately 8,000 absentee ballot requests during an average general election which is less than 5 percent of the total votes. The cost associated with each ballot sent is approximately \$2.50 per mailing. If the number of absentee requests were to increase to 25 percent of the 160,000, we would be required to send out 40,000 absentee ballots.

More absentee ballots will also require more time to process and canvass those ballots before Election Day. So, I urge the governor to use his executive authority to extend ballot canvassing for the entire period of early voting and allow tabulation to begin the Friday before Election Day, October 30th.

If planned deliberately and funded as needed, my fellow county clerks, election officials and I can prepare and hold an adequate election in the middle of a health crisis while setting the standard for future elections.

Terri Hollingsworth
Pulaski County Circuit and County Clerk