

News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Somerset County Completes Record Voter Registration Input, Mails Ballots to All Voters

County Shifts Resources to Verifying and Inputting Ballots as Received, and Providing Replacement Ballots for Voters Who Request Them

Somerville, NJ – With more than two weeks left in the unprecedented 2020 General Election, Somerset County has completed registering or updating a record 13,000 voter registrations and mailed ballots to every active registered voter. At the same time, the county has received and processed more than 70,000 ballots – more than four times the *total* mail in ballots voted during the 2016 presidential election – and is now inputting ballots into the State Voter Registration System (SVRS) within an average of five to seven days of receipt.

“This has been an all-hands-on-deck effort to meet the requirements of the 2020 election, with every department in the county lending support to the County Clerk and Board of Elections to ensure a free and fair election,” said Somerset County Freeholder Director Shanel Robinson. “The voter participation in this election has been extraordinary and we are thrilled to see it. However, we are thankful for the patience of those who were frustrated at not being able to track their ballot.”

The 2020 General Election is being conducted with almost all voting conducted remotely on paper ballots and is seeing a heightened level of voter interest. In 2016, there were more than 150,000 ballots cast in Somerset County in the presidential election. The County Clerk has already mailed out more than 250,000 ballots in 2020, and the expectation is there will be far more voters participating this year.

The Board of Elections and County Clerk’s Office have two overarching goals to conduct a free and fair election in 2020: 1) that every eligible voter who wants to cast a ballot receives a ballot to submit; and 2) that every properly submitted ballot is counted and certified in the final election results.

“Not only is this a pivotal election at every level, but we are conducting it with new processes to protect the health of both staff and voters during this COVID pandemic,” said Somerset County Clerk Steve Peter. “I am thankful to the Freeholders and the administration for being flexible, and for shifting resources to ensure the Board of Elections and County Clerk’s Office can provide a safe, fair election for everyone.”

The Board of Elections made a decision to put the majority of its early resources into ensuring that every new and reactivated voter was entered into the SVRS. With the reallocation of resources the Board was able to complete the task just three days after voter registration closed on Friday, October 16. This allows the Clerk's Office to complete the mailing of ballots to new and reactivated voters by Monday, October 19 with more than two weeks left before ballots must be submitted or postmarked.

"With already four times the registrations and ballots to process with the same resources, we've had to carefully allocate those resources to get this work done in an efficient and timely manner," said Elections Board Administrator Jerry Midgette. "We're grateful to all the county employees, municipal clerks, and the voters who have stepped up to help us during this critical period in this election cycle."

Now that the voter registration process is completed, the Board of Elections is redirecting substantial resources towards inputting and verifying the signatures on every ballot that has been received to date. Once the time-consuming process is completed, ballots will be marked as "received" in the SVRS and the State of New Jersey's Track My Ballot System.

The SVRS will continue to report that ballots are "received" until after the election closes on November 3, and will then mark ballots that were counted as "accepted" and those that were set aside for errors in submission as "rejected."

A voter whose ballot has not yet arrived, have been lost or damaged, or were filled out incorrectly can request a replacement ballot to be mailed to them online at <https://www.co.somerset.nj.us/government/elected-officials/county-clerk/election-division/vote-by-mail/request-duplicate-ballot> until Friday, October 23.

Voters can request a replacement ballot or submit their ballot in person at the County Administration Building atrium at 20 Grove Street in Somerville from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays. On Wednesdays October 21 and October 28, the atrium will be open until 6 p.m., and on Saturdays October 24 and 31 the atrium will be open from 9 a.m. to noon. Voters must wear a face mask and practice social distancing during these open office hours.

Somerset County has compiled information, video tutorials, and other support for voters in the 2020 General Election at <http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/2020General>. Any voter who has a question they need answered is encouraged to fill out the form at <https://www.co.somerset.nj.us/government/elected-officials/county-clerk/2020-election-guide/election-questions> in order to receive a response within one business day.

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