

RESOLUTION NO. 30412

A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR CHANGE IN VOTING PROCEDURES BY THE TENNESSEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO GIVE EVERY ELIGIBLE VOTER THE OPPORTUNITY TO CAST THEIR BALLOT WITHOUT THE RISK OF CONTRACTING OR SPREADING COVID-19.

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WHEREAS, there is a need for immediate federal and state action to ensure that every eligible voter has the opportunity to cast their ballot without the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the United States of America is simultaneously in the midst of an unprecedented global viral outbreak and an extremely consequential series of elections. The rapid spread of COVID-19 has halted virtually all public gatherings and rendered the act of leaving one's home for non-essential reasons dangerous. As things stand, both of these acts are necessary for millions of American voters to uphold their Constitutional right to select their representatives; and.

WHEREAS, if left unchanged, our current electoral system poses a severe public health risk that could rapidly accelerate the spread of COVID-19 while disenfranchising countless voters and calling into question the legitimacy of our elections. This limitation in our state on absentee voting during the pandemic has recently been found to constitute "an unreasonable burden on the fundamental right to vote guaranteed by the Tennessee Constitution" by Davidson County Chancellor Ellen Hobbs Lyle on June 4, 2020. Just like our healthcare system

and our economy, our elections infrastructure will need a massive infusion of resources to ensure that elections can go on and every voter has access to the ballot during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE, that it is hereby that the Tennessee General Assembly is urged to implement the following election reforms for municipal and/or general elections in this state during the coronavirus pandemic as follows:

1. A universal and easily accessible vote-by-mail system which should include:
  - a. Provisions for free or prepaid postage;
  - b. Allowing ballots postmarked by Election Day to count;
  - c. Reforming any signature match laws to protect voters;
  - d. Allowing community organizations to collect and deliver voted, sealed ballots;
  - e. Extended early voting periods to allow for in-person voters to practice social distancing;
  - f. Expanded voter registration options, including both online and same-day registration;
  - g. Voter outreach and education to raise awareness around these changes;
  - h. Prohibition of polling place adjustments that disproportionately affect marginalized communities; and
  - i. To ensure that the millions of overseas American voters can participate fully in the political process.

2. Be it further RESOLVED that we encourage our political leaders to set aside party affiliation and to act in the best interest of our nation. As our government takes action to protect our economy from COVID-19, we cannot and will not allow our system of counting every citizen's vote to fall by the wayside. Action to safeguard our electoral system cannot wait as shown by the current litigation which has been heard by Chancellor Lyle. In a matter of months, millions of Americans across several states will be asked to vote in municipal and primary elections, and they deserve better than the impossible choice between preserving their well-being and casting their ballots in a manner which violates the Tennessee Constitution.

3. Be it further RESOLVED that our City Council encourages all federal, state, and local policymakers and Hamilton County election officials to act now to protect the health of our families, neighbors, and communities and ensure that our elections can occur without risk to the health and safety of our voters. We urge our election laws to be changed to adopt all of the reasonable methods set forth above to allow all eligible ballots to be counted by voting in person or by mail in ballots in methods which are approved by the courts or enacted by our General Assembly in future elections in the fall of 2020 and during the spring of 2021 in this City.

ADOPTED: July 14, 2020

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