



**Testimony of Alisa Kaplan, Executive Director
Reform for Illinois**

House Executive Committee

Re: SB 1863, House Amendment 5

May 20, 2020

The COVID-19 crisis demands that significant steps be taken before November's election to protect our democracy and the health and safety of Illinois voters.

Reform for Illinois appreciates several provisions in House Amendment 5, including those that would provide curbside voting and keep countywide vote centers open on Election Day.

However, we believe that the provision that would send vote by mail applications to individuals who had voted in an election since 2018 is insufficient to ensure a robust, safe election in November. Instead, **Illinois should send every registered voter a postage-paid ballot.**

Applications are a barrier to mail-in voting, and create administrative costs for election authorities that could be better spent on ballot processing. The application process caused countless problems for states including [Wisconsin](#) and [Ohio](#), overwhelming election officials with requests that crashed their systems and leaving many voters frustrated and disenfranchised.

Sending everyone a ballot is the only way to guarantee that everyone can vote safely on Election Day, even if in-person voting must be restricted. That's why [California](#) is sending ballots to registered voters in the fall. And with much less time to prepare than Illinois, [New Jersey](#), [Maryland](#), and [Nevada](#) are doing the same for their summer primaries.

If those states can do this, so can we.

We understand the very real challenges of this plan including the cost, logistics, and speed necessary to put it into place before November. However, **the state must prepare for and fund a dramatic increase in vote by mail in November regardless of the specific policy it adopts now. Unnecessary ballot application costs would just add to the burden.** Moreover, mail-in voting was already expanding before this epidemic, and any investments in vote by mail infrastructure may reap significant returns in the future.

In addition, commonly repeated concerns about vote by mail have been overblown, with research showing vote by mail bestows [no partisan advantage](#) and that [fraud is "extremely rare"](#).

Most importantly, mail-in voting provides the safest choice for voters and for a state trying to keep coronavirus infection levels from resurging. The best way to encourage it, and to ensure the smoothest possible election in November, is to send every registered voter a ballot.

We urge you to vote no on House Amendment 5 to SB 1863 and instead provide for sending every registered voter a ballot for the November 2020 election. Thank you for your consideration.