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Senate President Don Harmon
Senate Minority Leader Bill Brady
House Speaker Michael Madigan
House Minority Leader Jim Durkin
Members of the General Assembly

From: Joann Wong, policy analyst, Better Government Association

Re: November 2020 election

Dear Illinois lawmakers:

As the General Assembly convenes this week to act on urgent matters, the Better Government Association commends legislators for taking steps to protect the safety and integrity of the Nov. 3 election.

Faced with the possibility of a lingering or resurgent coronavirus, our shared objective is to avoid the hazards of the March 17 primary. Last-minute decisions related to COVID-19 led to poorly communicated polling location closures, long lines and big crowds, heightening the risks for poll workers and voters alike.

SB1863 (Amendment 5) contains provisions that address many of these concerns, including offering curbside voting and keeping early voting super-centers open on Election Day.

But the BGA has reservations about the plan to send applications for mail-in ballots to a subset of registered voters. **The BGA urges you to amend SB1863 to send all registered voters a postage-paid ballot — NOT simply an application — this fall.**

Sending a ballot instead of an application would be the most prudent measure to maximize voter participation. It preserves the option to vote in the event that in-person voting becomes too difficult or dangerous because of public health concerns. It would also remove a layer of administrative processing for election authorities and lessen the burden on an already overtaxed postal service.

Sending applications would also be an inefficient use of already limited funds. Ohio estimates that it spent [\\$2.4 million](#) printing and sending out postcards with information on how to apply for a ballot to about [7.2 million voters](#). (For reference, Illinois has

roughly [8 million](#) registered voters.) The funds necessary to send applications would be better spent processing the increased volume of ballots.

Expanding and fortifying the state's existing vote-by-mail system is the most credible tool we have to prepare for November. Voting by mail allows electors to vote from the safety of their homes and provides a longer window in which to do so, which mitigates the possibility of last-minute problems. Given the continued uncertainty around COVID-19, Illinois should promote, expect and prepare for much greater vote-by-mail participation in November.

The BGA recommends:

1. Every registered voter should receive a ballot in the mail.

This is the most efficient way to get ballots into the hands of likely voters, whether or not they intend to vote by mail. This effort should also be accompanied by a concerted voter education campaign to increase voting by mail, with accessibility and language considerations in mind, and to encourage early voting.

2. Strengthen the existing vote-by-mail system by fortifying the ballot return process.

Including pre-paid envelopes increases the level of convenience for voters and neutralizes any ability-to-pay issues. In addition to being able to return completed ballots by mail or in person at a polling location, voters should have access to secure dropboxes. Dropboxes should be located in community-based locations that are accessible for voters with disabilities and close to public transportation.

Details of our complete plan for the November election can be found [here](#).

The Better Government Association is a non-partisan, nonprofit watchdog organization working for transparency, efficiency and accountability in government in Chicago and across Illinois.