



Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B

[DRAFT] RESOLUTION #4B-20-0408

Calling for Long-Term Commitment to Full Vote-by-Mail Elections Adopted April 27, 2020

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (Commission) takes note of the following:

- The District of Columbia is in the midst of an unprecedented public health emergency. Mayor Muriel Bowser has taken steps to slow community transmission of COVID-19 (coronavirus) by issuing a [Stay-at-Home Order](#) directing residents to stay at home except to perform essential activities. The DC Board of Elections has announced a [Vote Safe DC](#) campaign in response to the public health emergency, which includes efforts to encourage voters to stay home and submit requests for absentee ballots to vote by mail for the June 2nd primary and June 16th special election in Ward 2.
- The recent public health emergency demonstrates the concrete and immediate need to commit to full vote-by-mail elections, where ballots are mailed to every registered voter (and not just a form to request an absentee ballot). Some primary elections have exposed the inherent risks of in-person voting during a public health emergency. For example, in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, 40 people may have been infected with coronavirus as a result of Wisconsin's in-person election on April 7th. See Maxwell Tani "[At Least 40 Coronavirus Cases in One County Linked to Wisconsin Election](#)," *Daily Beast* (Apr. 25, 2020). And in Broward County, Florida, two poll workers tested positive for coronavirus following the presidential primary. See Rachel M. Cohen, "[As Democrats Push Vote-by-Mail, Local Governments are Leading the Charge on Safe Voting](#)," *The Intercept* (Apr. 20, 2020).
- In addition to public health and safety benefits, vote-by-mail elections offer increased voter convenience and satisfaction, as well as increased voter participation. Eight members of the DC Council (Brienne K. Nadeau (Ward 1), Mary M. Cheh (Ward 3), David Grosso (At-Large), Kenyan R. McDuffie (Ward 5), Charles Allen (Ward 6), Robert C. White, Jr. (At-Large), Anita D. Bonds (At-Large), and Jack Evans (Ward 2)) recognized these benefits in the proposed Vote by Mail Amendment Act of 2019, [B23-0319](#).

See Press Release, “[Nadeau Introduces Vote-By-Mail Bill to Increase Voter Participation](#)” (June 4, 2019) (noting benefits of vote-by-mail, including increased convenience for voters and increased turnout, especially among low propensity voters). Members of the DC Democratic State Committee similarly called for testing vote by mail during the Ward 4 special election for State Board of Education as a mechanism to increase voter turnout. See Todd Brogan & Charles Wilson, “[A special election and a special opportunity to improve our democracy](#),” *Petworth News* (Aug. 31, 2018) (“In Ward 4 alone, we heard from residents who either didn’t or almost didn’t make it to the polls thanks to the length of their commute, the hours they worked, their family and childcare obligations, the inaccessibility or poor frequency of public transit, their lack of confidence in those clunky electronic voting machines, or a lack of paper ballots at their precinct.”); Charles E. Wilson, “[The District’s low voter turnout offers opportunity for serious election reforms](#),” *Washington Post*, (July 27, 2018) (“The District must create an election reform agenda that empowers residents of all ages and takes into account the realities of 21st-century work, parenting and commuting in the District. Voting by mail, combined with the option of in-person voting at the polls, represents a glowing opportunity for the District to expand voting access and eliminate existing barriers to the voting booth on Election Day.”). In 2014, the Board of Elections proposed vote by mail as a cheaper option for the Ward 8 special election for State Board of Education, but the DC Council did not act on that proposal, and fewer than 3 percent of the Ward’s 54,000 registered voters showed up at the polls. Emma Brown, “[Tierra Jolly wins D.C. State Board of Education Race](#),” *Washington Post* (July 16, 2014).

- A robust program and commitment to full vote-by-mail recognizes Mayor Bowser’s dedication to a Resilient DC. The Mayor has defined “urban resilience” as “the capacity of individuals, communities, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and thrive no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.” “Shocks” are defined as “sudden, acute disasters, like storms, floods, heatwaves, or cyberattacks,” as well as “economic crises, like a government shutdown or relocation of a major employer.” See Mayor Muriel Bowser, [Resilient DC: A Strategy to Thrive in the Face of Change](#) (Apr. 29, 2019). The current public health emergency is a shock that requires strategies to ensure resiliency regarding the fundamental right to vote, and full vote-by-mail is one such strategy that would prepare us for this and future shocks.
- The Commission recognizes the challenges of moving to full vote-by-mail with regard to logistical hurdles, participation challenges, and election security. See, e.g., M. Mindy Moretti, “[CISA COVID working group releases FAQs on expanding absentee/VBM](#),” *electionline* (Apr. 9, 2020) (“For places like the District of Columbia where only about 8 percent of the 2016 general election ballots were cast by absentee, the move to greatly expand voting by mail will be a big lift, *but not impossible*.”)

(emphasis added). Information regarding best practices in other jurisdictions will be necessary and helpful to assist in the development of a long-term plan to move to full vote-by-mail elections. *See, e.g.,* Dominique Maria Bonessi, [“Voting During a Pandemic: What Maryland Voters Need to Know About Upcoming Elections,”](#) WAMU (Apr. 3, 2020) (discussing Maryland’s move to vote-by-mail with an option for in-person voting for June primary). Special elections in the District might serve as an opportunity to build and to test a scalable infrastructure that could be expanded as the need arises without overtaxing the system. *See* Todd Brogan & Charles Wilson, [“A special election and a special opportunity to improve our democracy,”](#) *Petworth News* (Aug. 31, 2018) (calling for the District to test vote by mail via the Ward 4 special election for State Board of Education).

RESOLVED:

- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the Mayor, the DC Council, and the DC Board of Elections to take action to ensure robust and resilient voting processes in the District, including through a sustained effort to move to full vote-by-mail elections (while maintaining in-person voting options) by November 2020, if possible, or as soon as possible thereafter.
- As part of this effort, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the DC Board of Elections, in coordination with the Mayor and the DC Council, to develop and release to the public a comprehensive, step-by-step plan for full vote-by-mail elections. The plan should include details regarding resources necessary for printing, mailing (including return mail), publicly processing, and recording votes by mail; timeline; and possible hurdles. In developing this plan, the Board of Elections should look to best practices from other states that have implemented vote-by-mail elections, including those that have moved recently toward vote-by-mail elections in response to the public health emergency, and consider testing vote by mail via any special elections in the District.
- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the Mayor and the DC Council to adequately fund measures to satisfy any commitment to full vote-by-mail elections.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Commission designates Commissioner Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02, to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this Resolution.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, in the event the designated representative Commissioner cannot carry out their representative duties for any reason, the Commission authorizes the Chair to designate another Commissioner to represent the Commission in all matter relating to this Resolution.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, consistent with DC Code § 1-309, only actions of the full Commission voting in a properly noticed public meeting have standing and carry great weight. The actions, positions, and opinions of individual commissioners, insofar as they may be contradictory to or otherwise inconsistent with the expressed position of the full Commission in a properly adopted resolution or letter, have no standing and cannot be considered as in any way associated with the Commission.

ADOPTED by voice vote at a regular public meeting (notice of which was properly given, and at which a quorum of __ of nine members was present) on April 27, 2020, by a vote of _ yes, _ no, _ abstentions.