

**Meeting between the Cook County Clerk's
Election Division Office and the Voter Service Committee
Of the League of Women Voters of Cook County**

December 15, 2020

**Responses of Clerk's Office to Questions and Recommendations
from the League following up on the November 3 Election**

Note that the Cook County Clerk is the Election Authority for suburban Cook County.

The Chicago Board of Elections is the Election Authority for voters who live in the City of Chicago. A separate meeting will be held with the Chicago Board of Elections.

Present for the Cook County Clerk's Office: Deputy Clerk of Elections Edmund Michalowski, Director of Communications Sally Daly, Legal Counsel James Nally, election equipment specialist Marco Arteaga, and Assistant Deputy Director of Elections LaTanya Lumpkin.

Present for the Cook County League: Nancy Marcus, Carolyn Cosentino, Diane Edmundson, Helene Gabelnick, Pris Mims, Chris Ruys, and Cynthia Schilsky.

Following are the questions posed by the League and the responses from the Clerk's Office:

1. Recommend that Clerk and Board of Elections coordinate dates, nomenclature (e.g., any need for "Grace Period Registration"?), policies as much as feasible.
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Receptive to coordinating closer with respect to dates and nomenclature. In particular, League brought up that the Chicago Board of Elections has dropped the term "Grace Period Registration," and office agreed that no longer serves a purpose as a distinction from Early Voting.
2. Recommend that both Election Authorities compare/contrast voter info web sites and pick out elements to utilize for future that are better for providing information. Consider using local universities as "class projects." The League (and others) were going to both web sites often to gain information and one was generally easier to navigate than the other. But more consistency with the layout between the two (take the best from each) would have made it easier.
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Agreed that the web site the current Clerk inherited from the last one needs improvement. Planning on a redo and will look at the Board of Elections' site. However, pointed out how advanced the Clerk's web site is with regard to the translation ability into many different languages.
3. What would each Election Authority like to keep (either through a new state statute or through own practice or local ordinance) from the Illinois Public Act 101-0642 for Nov. 3 election for future elections. What shouldn't be kept and what other changes should be made to existing state election law for future.
 - a. **See the responses from the Clerk's Office in the attached document, "Discussion of 2020 Illinois Public Act 101-0642."**
4. Strongly recommend that better ways to update voter signatures be implemented. For example
 - a. Use of voter signature in last election that voted in person
 - b. Use of voter signature from Illinois driver's license/i.d.
 - c. Special form (such as what Chicago used, but improve)
 - i. **Clerk's response:** Talked about using a signature pad for capturing signatures when voters vote in person. Apparently, this is being used in Kane

County. **Note:** More follow-up on this is needed as this still requires the voter to first vote in person.

5. The Cook County League, the Chicago League and the other 12 local Leagues within Cook County want to help the Election Authorities by providing information to voters. The Chicago League has had a great contact person at the Chicago Board of Elections. We would like to have a similar person at the Clerk's office.
 - a. **Clerk's response:** LaTonya Lumpkin, Assistant Deputy Director of Elections, 312-603-0992, latonya.lumpkin@cookcountylil.gov, will be the contact for the Cook County League.
6. Recommend collaboration between the two election authorities so the same messages are sent to voters regarding their VBM status: from application to receipt of ballot. Further recommend that a sample of these messages be listed on the web site so the voter will know what to expect to receive.
 - a. **Clerk's response:** acknowledged recommendation; no commitment.
7. If VBM ballot from Chicago is dropped into a Suburban Cook County drop box, would it be discarded or would it be delivered to the Chicago Board of Elections? And vice versa?
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Clerk delivered to Chicago Board and vice versa on a daily basis.
8. Given the number of people voting by mail and voting early, is it possible to reduce the number of precincts and polling places – particularly when polling places are located close to each other. At a minimum, could precincts located at the same polling place be combined? A reduction of precincts and/or polling places would save money, as well as reduce the number of judges needed and reduce the number of precincts which do not have the required number of judges.
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Very receptive. Said that there were 1,000 polling places, but 1,600 precincts. Makes sense to combine them so one per polling place.
9. We understand that there may have been issues with voters using Sharpies to mark their ballots. Will only ball points or fine point pens be issued to polling places in the future?
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Said that using ball points has a negative impact on the scanners, but office is looking at alternatives.
10. Were there any issues as a result of the Chicago Board of Elections having a drop-off box at Union Station and the Clerk's office having both an early voting site and a drop-off box? It seems like this is a good location for both Election Authorities. If there were any issues, do you think these can be dealt with for future elections?
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Very enthusiastic about the Union Station site and would like to continue to have such a shared voting site. Amtrak was very welcoming. Unfortunately, Metra was not, which is why only at Union Station.
11. One suggestion given to us was that a statement at the bottom of each ballot side be added "Turn over to continue voting."
 - a. **Clerk's response:** Good idea.
12. How many people worked for the Clerk to process applications for VBM ballots?
 - a. **Clerk's response:** A total of 425 at the peak. Discovered that the biggest bottleneck to the process was extracting the ballots from the envelope.

13. Reports in the press indicated that the Clerk's office was not able to process VBM applications quickly enough to meet the statutory requirement to mail out VBM ballots on a timely basis. What changes are you planning to make for the future?

- a. **Clerk's response:** In the response to what should not be included in any future legislation (see the separate document attached), the office said there should be no statutory deadlines because cannot predict the volume of the applications coming in at any particular time.

14. How would the Clerk's office have handled these 3 situations that a League observer saw at the Chicago Board of Elections?

- a. In one case, the return envelope was completed by Peter ___, but the signature on file that popped up was for Marie ___ (same last name). Likely this was a case of 2 people with the same last name in the same household receiving VBM ballots. The signature was accepted, with one of the 3 judges expressing concern and another one stating that this was what they were told to do. We assume that the system thinks that Marie voted rather than Peter. What would happen if Marie goes to vote in person? And Peter presumably is not shown voting at all (unless Marie sent in his VBM ballot and her ballot was accepted even though Peter's signature would have shown up during the verification).
 - i. **Clerk's response:** Would have pulled the envelope and verified that simply a mix-up in returning the wrong VBM ballot and would have marked Peter as voting and then processed the ballot.
- b. In another case, there was a signature on file that popped up, but instead of a signature on the envelope, there were simply 'x's'. The panel of judges apparently were told to accept this. If this voter was not able to sign on the envelope, shouldn't there be a check on this? If the person went vote in person, the election judges likely would have asked for i.d.
 - i. **Clerk's response:** Said that this situation normally arose when the return envelope showed that the voter got assistance in voting.
- c. In another case, there was no signature on file, and the panel accepted the signature on the envelope. Our observer asked a Board employee about this and was told that the judges were instructed to accept the signature because "it wasn't the fault of the voter that no signature on file could be found." Again, should this voter have gone to vote in person, the election judges would have asked for i.d. Shouldn't this envelope and ballot been flagged to confirm with the voter?
 - i. **Clerk's response:** Would have gone to the Secretary of State's data base to check for a signature on a drivers' license or state i.d.; Note: not sure what would have happened if signature not there.

Also, was the signature on this envelope added to the data base for future signature verifications for this voter?

- ii. **Clerk's response:** No. It would not have been added.

15. We have identified a problem whereby people who had never voted by mail before and submitted an application this time online, were not able to track their VBM application and ballot status on the Clerk's web site, though they did receive confirming emails from the Clerk. In contrast, those who had voted by mail before and submitted their applications this time, were able to see their VBM application and ballot status on the web site, as well as receiving confirming emails.

- a. **Clerk's response:** Not sure if office fully understood the issue. It sounds like issue should be resolved by the next election.

16. The League has heard the Deputy Clerk of Elections tell the County Board that there were problems with the outside vendors providing the tracking systems for the VBM ballots, whether the ballots were mailed or placed in a drop-off box . The League received

questions/complaints from concerned voters who did not receive confirmation that their VBM ballots had been received weeks after they had been dropped off or mailed. Have those problems been fixed? Were the VBM ballots indeed processed on a timely basis, or were there any significant delays? If there were delays, what changes will you make in the future, recognizing that the numbers of VBM ballots far exceeded the numbers in the past.

- a. **Clerk's response:** Will be putting out an RFP to hire a company to collect VBM ballots from drop boxes in the future that can handle the tracking.

17. Recommend improving procedures for dealing with phone calls. Have heard complaints of people not getting through prior to the election. Consider looking at Cook County Treasurer's phone and email options to deal with FAQ's for ideas on how to be able to respond faster and with less administrative work on your part.

- a. **Clerk's response:** Very receptive and wanting to improve communications.

18. What significant changes are you planning for the Consolidated Elections in 2021?

- a. **Clerk's response:** Most of the changes will be on the back end, behind the scenes. Mentioned that voting sites will have a tool to notify that need an equipment technician and supplies, as opposed to trying to get through by phone. Working on improving the response from the field. Will not have drop boxes for this election unless the Illinois Legislature authorizes in time. Mentioned that should know by Dec. 17 deadline which communities will have primaries in Feb.

19. One final question: what changes would you like to see to the Illinois election law?

- a. **Clerk's response:**
 - i. Allow only one form of the paper application for a VBM ballot (that of the Election Authority),
 - ii. Authorize use of drop boxes, as was done for Nov. 3 election.
 - iii. Want a standardized format for objections to candidates petitions to allow for faster and easier data entry.
 - iv. Authorize service of objections to candidates via email, as was done for Nov. 3 election.