



**APPLIED POPULATION LABORATORY**

Department of Community and Environmental Sociology  
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Satya Rhodes-Conway, Mayor of Madison  
Mike May, City of Madison Attorney

May 30, 2020

Dear Mayor Rhodes-Conway and City Attorney May,

We are a group of quantitative data scientists, clinicians, and infectious disease specialists coordinating work within the academic community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**We write to you today to support proposals to allow all voters to submit a mail-in ballot for Wisconsin's April 7<sup>th</sup> election, and to extend the ballot deadline for that election.**

Given the speed of COVID-19's spread within Madison, Dane County, and the State of Wisconsin at this time, we feel strongly that **asking voters to attend in-person voting as usual presents an unreasonable risk to individual voters, poll workers, and the general public.**

Polling places are inherently high-contact settings which involve many individuals coming into close contact and touching the same objects over the course of a day. Paper ballots, equipment used to mark ballots, the ballot processing machine, government issued identification & verification, queuing to cast a vote, and signing the poll book are all high contact activities that cannot be easily or rapidly adapted to maintain social distancing and sanitary surface contact. It is our belief that asking people to vote under such circumstances is too high risk at this time.

In particular, we are especially concerned about the safety of election workers, who tend to be older and in the highest-risk categories for contracting COVID-19 and having serious complications arise. Those workers would be exposed to hundreds of voters per day, with no reasonable way to protect themselves. Even if it were possible to arrange voting lines in accordance with public health social distancing measures, poll workers cannot avoid contact as they check hundreds of ID's per day, handle the poll book, and handle ballots themselves.

We have already made tremendous social and economic sacrifices in order to protect our community from the pandemic. Asking voters to show up at polling places in person would undermine those other efforts substantially. **Extraordinary measures should be taken to safeguard the public health during the election.**

We believe that a reasonable alternative to in-person voting exists. Mail-in voting is safer and in line with public health recommendations to prevent further spread of COVID-19 in our community. All voters should be allowed to vote by mail in this election. In addition, in order to process such an extraordinary change to voting procedures, we believe it is necessary to delay the ballot deadline for this election.

Thank you for your consideration.

Signed,

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*Additional co-signatories can be found at this link.*

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BngXftVUynzA3ua7cF8ivT3USdEgEyydhw1Tcd6y-Z8/edit?usp=sharing>