

April 17, 2020

In the preparation of the 2020 General election cycle in this unprecedented time I, as a staff member of Mower County Auditor-Treasurer Office support the language contained to provide emergency framework around how to deliver the high quality of elections that Minnesota voters expect and deserve.

Below are a few questions and answers I compiled with responses from cities and townships and of those involved and immediately affected in the upcoming elections.

The questions asked are as follows:

1. Are you or a close family member in a compromised state of health that could be affected by the COVID-19 virus?
2. Do you have concerns of being able to find enough people to work at a polling place on Election Day?
3. What measures would you suggest to change to keep those in the polling place safe compared to the "normal" way of Election Day business?
4. Would you support the State to go to a mail ballot election for the August Primary?
5. Please add anything else you feel the Secretary of State Elections Division or our legislation should know or hear.

The responses below are from the cities and townships of Mower County, They speak volumes to the concern of those whom administer the voting as well as on behalf of the voters that me and those whom they serve every election cycle.

Ann M. Kasel -City Clerk of Austin

"The City of Austin has a great concern about being able to find election judges for the August and November Elections. I have already had judges tell me they are not willing to work due to the pandemic. If this crisis keeps up, there is no way we will be able to staff a Presidential Election at our 6 polling locations. I would like to see the State go to all mail balloting for the remainder of the 2020 Elections. I do not see any changes that could be made to keep the polling places safe for the election judges and voters."

Dawn Helgeson – Nevada Township Clerk

"We are mail ballot. My husband is compromised. I think they should all go mail ballot for the August Election. Hopefully everything is good for the November Election."

Adria Vargas - City Clerk/Treasurer - City of Brownsdale

1. Yes myself and a family member
2. Yes I have concerns to finding judges to man the polls.
3. Hands free voting, where they could register themselves on poll pads and take their own ballots from a box, limiting the number of voters inside the polls by passing out numbers
4. I would personally support mail in ballots for this August 2020 Primary and possibly the General Election in November depending on the spread of the pandemic.
5. We as public servants need to adopt all safety concerns, both personal and public. I feel that some people unknowingly put themselves and others at risk because there is something to do in a public setting. Some folks don't understand the ramifications it puts on others safety and well-being. Some

people's scenario: "It wouldn't happen to me", or "It can't happen here", puts people at risk without reason.

Kris Allas – Lansing Township Clerk and Rose Creek Clerk

1. No
2. No
3. Go to mail balloting only
4. Yes definitely
5. "I personally, do not see us, as a nation, getting back to the way life as it was before COVID-19. In order for everyone to have the right to vote, I believe that mail balloting is the way to go. Lansing Township had a much bigger increase, from poll voting to mail balloting. The City of Rose Creek has mail balloting and seems to really like it."

LuAnn Holst - Grand Meadow Township Clerk

"We currently have mail ballots in place and I would highly endorse mail ballots for the August Primary Election. I really have no other suggestion at this time."

Amanda Kiefer – Waltham Township Clerk

1. My nephew who comes to my house daily is compromised. Along with my father-in-law whom has cancer is compromised.
2. The township is a mail ballot precinct, but I know other cities, townships and counties will struggle to find help. For the March 3rd PNP, Olmsted County alone was 20% under the number of judges needed to administer the elections. This is likely to increase due to the age group and "fears/concerns" of all judge staff that in essence volunteer to work these polling places across the State.
3. If the elections must still go on in person, I feel that the State should be required to provide the proper tools to help keep the poll workers safe such as cleaning supplies, masks, hand sanitizer etc.
4. I absolutely would support the state going to mail balloting. Even though it would be more work on the counties, it would lessen the risk of many others and still give the voters a safe option to participate in their right to vote.
5. Legislation needs to reach out and hear from the people first hand who have to sit at the polls on election day and do what's right for the State and its people. Making the proper decisions now can make a world of difference later!

Mysti Acosta - City of Mapleview - Clerk/Treasurer

"I have two family members (children) who have lung issues, one being a chronic lung disease; I go nowhere that could compromise me for that reason. Otherwise we are already mail ballot. Thanks for asking!"

Chris Hyrkas – Grand Meadow City Clerk/Treasurer

1. I have one election judge that is in a compromised state of health. The other said not at this time.
2. I can only afford to lose one judge, or we will not have enough for the day.
3. Keep numbers of votes at a minimum in the building, everyone wear face masks and gloves.
4. Seems like it would be a good idea to go to mail balloting.
5. No comments provided.

Patty White – City Clerk Treasurer of Le Roy

1. Not that I am aware of; some of my judges are aged 60+ though.

2. I don't know if some of my judges would prefer to not work due to COVID-19. It is hard to know where everything will be at come election judge training time and the August primary.
3. I could see setting up the polling place with even more spacing than what was used for the PNP. I can also see having to use markers or something to allow for social distancing so that people in line would not get too close to each other. It could be done and we can certainly adapt to whatever comes from the SOS and State Legislature decides to do.
4. I would support a mail ballot election for the August primary. This still allows people the civic responsibility of being able to vote, but it keeps everything safer for everyone involved.
5. I would not want people to feel like the security of Minnesota elections is put at risk. I would not want to see the National Guard being assigned to be election judges. I think that would make people worried or scared to vote because they wouldn't see familiar faces at their polling place. I think whatever happens; Minnesota will still want to make sure they offer the safest election possible in all facets of the election process.

Diane Hanson – Frankford Township Clerk

“My personal opinion is to do the election via mail. It would be a good way to get a feeling of how elections would go if we officially went to mail in ballot for all elections.

I am also concerned about getting enough election judges due to the fact most of mine are retired older people. Thank you for your time!”

Elizabeth Rice Clerk/Treasurer of Leroy Township & Bennington Township

“Answers of both Bennington and LeRoy Townships are as follows:”

1. No
2. No
3. We have enough space at the town hall buildings to ensure that people can still following the 6 foot social distancing while in the building.
4. Both townships would support the mail balloting for the August Primary as long as it will not change their status to all mail balloting. They want to maintain the ability to hold the elections in their respective town halls in the future

Roxanne Holst - Red Rock Township Clerk

1. No
2. No
3. 6 foot enforcement
4. No- I don't support mail in ballots
5. Nothing to add

Nancy Lewison - Clerk of Lodi Township

1. No
2. No
3. Keeping a safe distance from voters and wearing masks if need be.
4. Yes
5. N/A

Mary Kenyon Clerk of Lyle Township

“At this time our Supervisors for Lyle Township want to have the Primary Election at the township hall in Lyle in August.”

Audrey Oehlke, Clerk of Racine Township

“This is our board’s response to your questions:”

1. No we don’t have a close family member that would be affected by the virus.
2. We have enough workers.
3. Keep voters and workers 6 feet apart and have hand sanitizer handy.
4. No we do not support mail balloting, but if the State decides to we will have to comply.
5. Nothing to add.

Dawn Helgeson – Nevada Township Clerk

“As of now, no one I know is affected by Covid-19. We already do mail ballots, but I think for the elections, the State should do mail balloting this year.”

Social distancing guidelines, if still in effect, will be very difficult to maintain in many of the polling places across the State, I believe the voters themselves may feel some concerns about their own personal safety impacting their accessibility to a safe balloting option.

In Mower County there are 34 precincts 13 of which are mail balloting precincts. While I understand that there are concerns of fraudulent activities that may occur utilizing the mail ballot process, I truly believe in the security and processes of the Minnesota Election Laws and there is no cause for any concerns. The integrity of the Minnesota Election Laws and systems is in the hands of not only legislation, but the hands of all Election Administrators across the State. As an Election Administrator myself, I have no reason to believe our residents are at risk and I take my job in the utmost responsibility to ensure a lawfully enacted election process is done. The processing time for mail and absentee voting is handled well here and within the seven days before the Election Day in Mower County. However, I do believe that an increase in time ahead of the seven days currently in place by law would be a necessity as I am anticipating there will be more absentee voting in the upcoming elections no matter what the legislation decides.

The cost-effective way of handling the voting in Mower County for our approximate 20,600 registered voters, in my opinion, would be to do mail balloting. The time and effort of planning and the cost to enlist more judges, purchase safety equipment, set up new ways to handle the polling place, and many more behind-the-scene planning will be very strenuous in comparison to the first option of mailing ballots. Time is of the essence these days so we must start now.

I urge the support and timely action upon consideration of the emergency election plans such as statewide mail balloting and extra funding for administration of elections in order to mitigate voter confusion and provide consistent practices for the August State Primary and November General elections. With candidate filings opening in just a few weeks, I encourage the legislature to move quickly on this issue.

Sincerely,

Amanda Kiefer
Deputy Auditor-Treasurer of Mower County
Specialty area of Election Administration