

News Release

All Oakland County voters to receive prepaid return postage for November 2020 election absentee ballots

Chairman Woodward, Commissioner Quarles champion safe, healthy and secure election solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic

July 27, 2020, OAKLAND COUNTY, MI. – At its July 23 meeting, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to establish the Oakland Together Absentee Ballot Program. This program will provide pre-paid return postage with the November 2020 election absentee ballots. The program will be funded with up to \$575,000 from the Oakland Together Local Government Partnership program, which was established with funds the county received from the federal CARES Act.

“We encourage everyone to vote by mail this year to protect voters and election workers during this global pandemic,” Board Chairman **David T. Woodward** (D-Royal Oak) said. “By covering the postage cost to send back voters’ ballots, we’ve removed a final barrier to make it easier for everyone to choose and vote by mail.”

Woodward established the Oakland County Safe, Healthy and Secure Election Advisory Council in June, which made the recommendation to establish the Oakland Together Absentee Ballot Program. The council, chaired by Commissioner **Nancy L. Quarles (D-Southfield)**, has worked to identify challenges and barriers for holding safe, healthy and secure elections in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“By putting this program in place, we want to further empower Oakland County residents to exercise their civic right, even as we navigate this unprecedented health crisis,” Quarles said. “We are removing the \$0.65 postage fee, or a ‘fee to vote,’ as another way to ensure that every vote is counted and every resident has a voice.”

Because of the amount of the required postage to return a ballot by mail, residents typically use two stamps and end up paying \$1.10 in postage. Oakland County is the first county in Michigan to pay for postage on all absentee ballots returned by mail.

Voters will still have the option to use local absentee ballot drop boxes to return their ballots.

In addition to the Oakland Together Absentee Ballot Program, the council has made several recommendations to the Board that have resulted in adopted resolutions. The resolutions, which are collectively referred to as the Oakland County Democracy Initiative, include:

- MR #20172, which urged all Oakland County residents to vote by mail to avoid COVID-19 exposure at polling locations. This was adopted on June 25.
- MR #20183, which created an interlocal agreement to facilitate local communities partnering with the county clerk to process and count absentee ballots. In accordance with PA 95 of 2020, Oakland County received requests for assistance from 20 local communities for the primary and 40 local communities for the general. This was adopted on June 4.
- MR #20241, which appropriated \$500,000 to communicate about the safety of absentee voting and provide clear instructions to voters on the primary ballot. This was adopted on July 2.
- MR #20220, which appropriated funding for new voter tabulation equipment and the purchase of a new virtual election worker training program so that all communities can train new workers remotely. This was adopted on July 2.
- MR #20250, which provides an additional \$50 of pay to election workers at poll locations and absentee ballot counting boards in an effort to combat staffing shortages, as the average age of poll workers is 75 years old and places them in a higher risk category for COVID-19. This was adopted on July 15.

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