

STATEMENT AND SUMMARY OF FINAL REPORT OF SELECT COMMITTEE ON 2020 EMERGENCY ELECTION SUPPORT

Concord, NH-June 8, 2020. Bradford Cook, Chair of The Select Committee on 2020 Emergency Election Support, appointed by Secretary of State William M. Gardner, issued the following statement: “Today the Committee sent its report to Mr. Gardner. The Committee would summarize its work in the following way:

The 31-page report resulted from public meetings held during late April, May and the first week of June, during which the Committee invited and received input from staff of the Secretary of State and Attorney General, local election officials, interest groups, political parties, educational institutions, labor organizations, and the public, in studying the issues involved in the public health emergency presented this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as it affects the conduct of elections and other election-related matters, and how federal funds provided the Secretary of State should be expended.

A summary of the recommendations and finding of the report includes:

The safest way to keep voters and election workers safe during the Fall Primary and General Election is for as many voters as possible to vote by absentee ballot.

A vast increase in the number of absentee ballots will require new processes and create new expenses for the conduct of elections.

In-person elections will continue to be held, and measures must be designed to keep voters and election workers safe during such elections.

Other election-related matters like changing party registration, registering to vote, filing for office, and changing back to undeclared status during primaries, need to be available in a way to be done remotely and/or safely, in order to keep municipal offices and polling places uncrowded and safe.

Opportunities for voters to obtain ballots and vote absentee in person should be provided for a reasonable time prior to election day, especially in larger communities.

The following priorities for spending federal funds received by the Secretary of State from the Cares Act, and any other funds available from future federal appropriations or other sources are recommended by the Committee:

- Payment of the costs of accounting for the funds and following the federal guidelines
- Providing Personal Protective Equipment for Poll Workers and Voters
- Publicizing the Availability of Absentee Voting and Registration—including a mailing to all New Hampshire households providing information on how to do so easily
- Paying for Prepaid postage for return of Absentee Ballots and Increased Cost of Sending them

Funding Additional Polling Place Costs—Safety, Relocation and Expansion
Paying for Additional Envelopes and Printing Costs
Funding a Secretary of State Hot Line
Paying for Leasing of Additional Ballot-Counting Machines

The report contains extensive suggestions on safely conducting elections, and the use of safety equipment. It also has suggestions on making the process of voting and registering to vote by absentee means more streamlined.

Summing up its work, the members said, “Finally, we have come to realize the importance of the work we have been assigned, and the critical significance of making safe election procedures to all who want to vote, and those who help make it happen. It is not overly dramatic to say that unless New Hampshire and all other states get this right this year, the future of our nation and world could be affected, forever.”

Members of the Committee are Manchester Attorney Bradford E. Cook (Chair), Rep. Barbara Griffin of Goffstown, Bedford Attorneys Katherine Hanna and Eugene Van Loan, III, long-time town clerk Kathy Seaver of Farmington, and Sen. Thomas Sherman, M.D., of Rye. The report was adopted unanimously by the Committee on June 4.”

For more information, contact the Committee Chair Bradford Cook, at 493-7351.