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Susanne R. Young, Secretary

TO: Adam Greshin, Commissioner, Finance and Management

FROM: Susanne Young, Secretary, Agency of Administration
Jim Condos, Secretary of State

RE: Mailed Australian ballots for voters on Town Meeting Day

DATE: December 31, 2020

Total Amount Requested: \$1.5 million to the Secretary of State to provide grants to offset non-budgeted, additional costs to municipalities to produce and mail annual town meeting municipal and/or school budget Australian ballots to all active, registered voters. This request is pursuant to Section B.1109(c)(1) of Act 154 (2020). On December 27, 2020, the federal government provided additional time to spend CRF money and the proposed reallocation needs prompt action due to the time-sensitive nature of the proposed use.

Request Background: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many eligible voters on Town Meeting Day will not be able or willing to vote in person or attend a traditional floor meeting. We must ensure voters can safely and securely participate in all elections, not just the November election. At the time of this writing, Vermont's COVID-19 rates are higher than at any time in the past year. Despite the initial availability of a vaccine, Vermonters are unlikely to be able to gather safely in a congregate setting, such as an in-person town meeting discussion this spring. The option to vote by mail offers everyone a safe alternative.

Additional Details: Pursuant to [Act 154, Sec. B. 1114](#), and [Act 162](#), school boards and municipalities have the authority to conduct meetings by Australian ballot during the 2020-2021 year without further voter approval. Municipalities are strongly encouraged to conduct all meetings by Australian ballot this spring. Although it is difficult to predict the trajectory of the virus, many school boards and municipalities need to plan and warn district meetings in January due to statutory timelines, and the current health conditions point to public gatherings such as local town meetings being challenging to implement. Since the number of attendees at such meetings cannot be restricted, and it is not advisable to hold virtual "floor" meetings, the use of Australian Ballot can ensure both public safety and robust participation. This funding will align with the preemptive work of the House and Senate Government Operations Committees on this issue.

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Request: A \$1.5 million appropriation to the Secretary of State's office would allow and incentivize all municipalities to mail ballots to every eligible voter. This amount will account for expenses incurred above and beyond normal already-budgeted election expenses for town and annual meetings, including: mailing to active, registered voters in towns choosing to take advantage of this funding, production of ballots for those towns changing to Australian Ballot for this year only, and return postage on those ballots. Similar to the General Election in November, municipalities will work with the Secretary of State to have their incurred costs above and beyond their normally incurred costs reimbursed.

Urgency of Request and Timeline: Town Meeting Day is on March 2nd. Towns are planning for Town Meeting Day now per the statutory deadlines listed below. To ensure there is time for municipalities to make a switch to using and mailing an Australian ballot, the funding should be available as soon as possible so that municipalities may apply for it, contract with mail houses, and plan accordingly.

Town Meeting Day: Tue, March 2.

Ballots prepared: Wed, February 10.

Warning: Sun, January 31.

Candidate filing to get on ballot: Mon, Jan 25.

Article Petition filing: Thu, January 14.

Confirmation Proposal Complies with CARES Act CRF Guidelines: The State consultant advised the proposed uses are eligible uses of CRF under current US Treasury guidelines.

