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### **New Legislation Brings Changes for Voters**

The ending of the legislative session on May 3, 2019, brought many changes to the administration of elections with the passing of CS/SB 7066. Several changes that will directly affect voters include revising the date of the Primary Election from 10 to 11 weeks prior to the General Election, and changes to the vote-by-mail and provisional ballot certificates, deadlines for requesting and picking up vote-by-mail ballots and deadlines for curing signatures.

Moving the Primary Election back a week provides more time to resolve any issues, e.g. close races and recounts, and opens a window to extend the deadline for curing signatures on provisional and late returned vote-by-mail ballots. Voters with missing or questionable signatures will now have until the second day after an election to submit a signature cure affidavit and will be notified using the additional contact information that is now required on the vote-by-mail and provisional ballot certificates. Using the e-mail addresses and the home and cell phone numbers provided, voters will be contacted and directed to the signature cure affidavit and directions on our website. The new law also allows us to use the signature affidavit to update your signature that is on file, thus eliminating the second step of mailing you a voter registration application for a signature update. Although this bill solidifies the practice of notifying voters with missing or deficient signatures, I'm proud to say Pasco County has been doing this for several years.

Other changes that affect voting by mail include an earlier date for the mass mailing of ballot requests on file, an earlier date in which a designee with written authorization may pick up a ballot for another voter at one of our offices, and an earlier deadline for a new request for a ballot that is to be mailed. We will now do the mass mailing as early as 40 days prior to an election rather than 35 days, designees may pick up ballots nine days prior to an election rather than 5 days, and the deadline to request a ballot to be mailed has changed from 4 days prior to an election to 8 days prior. These changes seek to mitigate situations where ballots are jeopardized by delays in the mail and late returns by the voters.

Another change is that we are no longer required to publish a sample ballot in a newspaper of general circulation. Sample ballots will still be available on-line, and we will continue to mail sample ballots to voters on file. Sample ballots are forwardable, but keeping your address updated will insure that you receive your sample ballot.

As many of you know, my colleagues and I have worked tirelessly to advocate for legislation that exempts voter registration information from being public record. Although we have yet to meet our goal, we have made progress in that CS/HB 281 now allows for the exemption of voter registration information for 16 and 17-year olds who have preregistered to vote. The bill recognizes that the potential misuse of personal information of vulnerable minors could ultimately discourage participation in a program designed to do the complete opposite. While we will continue to advocate, it is important to remember the words of Confucius, "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones."

