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**From:** "Amber Sowers (Solicitor's Office)" <asowers@hallcounty.org>  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 14, 2020 at 1:02 PM  
**To:** AO Records <records@americanoversight.org>  
**Subject:** open records request

EXTERNAL SENDER

Amber Redford Sowers  
Chief Assistant Solicitor General  
State Court of Hall County  
225 Green Street  
P.O. Box 1072  
Gainesville, Georgia 30503  
(770) 531-7012

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## OFFICE OF THE SOLICITOR - GENERAL OF HALL COUNTY

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STEPHANIE D. WOODARD  
SOLICITOR - GENERAL

HALL COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
225 GREEN STREET  
P.O. BOX 1072  
GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA 30503  
TELEPHONE 770-531-7012

October 14, 2020

Mr. Austin Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight

RE: open records request pertaining to Georgia's Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force

Dear Mr. Evers:

Pursuant to your open records request regarding the above listed matter I have attached the all emails and articles that were sent or received by Mrs. Woodard. We apologize for any delay as the county computer system experienced a crash that left us without access for nearly a week! As the file was relatively small and I was able to email these items to you no costs will be assessed.

Sincerely,

Amber Redford Sowers  
Chief Assistant Solicitor  
Hall County, Georgia

## Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)

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**From:** Germany, Ryan <rgermany@sos.ga.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 8, 2020 6:13 PM  
**To:** Brad Rigby; Shannon Wallace; BChristine@usa.doj.gov; Tasha Mosley; gedwards@dougherty.ga.us; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office); barry.morgan@cobbcounty.org; rszabo@pacga.org; Jennifer E. Logan; Christopher Channell  
**Cc:** Watson, Frances; Harvey, Chris; Fuchs, Jordan; Schaffer, Ari; Holland, Gabrielle; Evans, Blake  
**Subject:** Investigation update

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Task Force members,

You may have seen some press on potential double voting (voting both absentee and in person) during the June primary. That investigation is still ongoing, but I wanted to provide you with some preliminary data. We will be keeping you all updated as the investigation progresses.

So far, we have identified just over 1000 voters who have both an absentee vote and an Election Day vote cast in their name during the June primary. We identified these voters by comparing Election Day check-in information to data re. accepted absentee ballots. The potential incidents span 100 counties.

There are systematic checks to stop double voting from happening, and those checks appear to be largely working as intended. Out of the approximately 150,000 voters who cancelled their absentee ballot to vote on Election Day, 149,000 were able to do so successfully without double voting.

Of the 1000 incidents, we know of at least one so far where the individual attempted to vote twice in order to see if he could. Other people likely voted twice inadvertently or because they were not sure if their absentee ballot had been returned on time by the mail service. Our investigation encompasses both the voters and the counties where this occurred.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any further questions. My direct contact info is below.

Thanks,  
Ryan

--

**C. Ryan Germany**  
*Georgia Secretary of State*  
Direct: 470-312-2808  
Cell: 678-672-9230  
[rgermany@sos.ga.gov](mailto:rgermany@sos.ga.gov)



## Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)

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**From:** Nealey, Donna <dnealey@sos.ga.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 10:13 AM  
**To:** Bobby.Christine@usdoj.gov; Watson, Frances; Fuchs, Jordan; Raffensperger, Brad; Germany, Ryan; Rayburn, Kevin; Harvey, Chris; barry.morgan@cobbcounty.org; cchannell@glynncounty.ga.gov; gedwards@dougherty.ga.us; james.stuchell@usdoj.gov; jelogan@jacksoncountygov.com; rszabo@pacga.org; swallace@cherokeega.com; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office); tasha.mosley@claytoncountyga.gov; Schaffer, Ari; jelogan@jacksoncountygov.com; rszabo@pacga.org; swallace@cherokeega.com; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office); tasha.mosley@claytoncountyga.gov; Schaffer, Ari  
**Subject:** Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force - Thursday, May 21, 2020 - 10:30am  
**Attachments:** Absentee Ballot Task Force agenda 5.21.2020.doc

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**AGENDA ATTACHED** – Please find attached the agenda for the Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force meeting.

TO: Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force  
FROM: Francis Watson - Chief Investigator  
Investigations Division - Georgia Secretary of State  
DATE: Thursday, May 21, 2020  
TIME: 10:30am  
CALL: Call in (312) 584-2401  
Meeting extension: 4418575#

Please join the Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force call that is scheduled for Thursday, May 21, 2020 at 10:30am.

Secretary Brad Raffensperger and Deputy Secretary Jordan Fuchs will be on the call.

If you need to contact Frances Watson directly, her contact information is as follows:

Frances Watson  
Chief Investigator  
Investigations Division  
Georgia Secretary of State  
Main: 470-312-2774  
Cell: 404-683-3226  
[fwatson@sos.ga.gov](mailto:fwatson@sos.ga.gov)

Thank you.

**Donna Nealey**  
Office Manager/Executive Assistant

Georgia Secretary of State – Brad Raffensperger  
214 State Capitol  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
470-312-2801 – office phone number  
470-572-7793 – cell number  
[dnealey@sos.ga.gov](mailto:dnealey@sos.ga.gov)



## Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)

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**From:** Nealey, Donna <dnealey@sos.ga.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 12, 2020 12:19 PM  
**To:** Watson, Frances; Fuchs, Jordan; Raffensperger, Brad; Germany, Ryan; Rayburn, Kevin; Harvey, Chris; barry.morgan@cobbcounty.org; bchristine@usa.doj.gov; cchannell@glynncounty.ga.gov; gedwards@dougherty.ga.us; james.stuchell@usdoj.gov; jelogan@jacksoncountygov.com; rszabo@pacga.org; swallace@cherokeega.com; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office); tasha.mosley@claytoncountygov.gov; Schaffer, Ari  
**Subject:** Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force - Thursday, May 21, 2020 - 10:30am  
**Attachments:** Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force

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TO: Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force  
FROM: Francis Watson - Chief Investigator  
Investigations Division - Georgia Secretary of State  
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Frances Watson  
Chief Investigator  
Investigations Division  
Georgia Secretary of State  
Main: 470-312-2774  
Cell: 404-683-3226  
[fwatson@sos.ga.gov](mailto:fwatson@sos.ga.gov)

Thank you.

**Donna Nealey**  
*Office Manager/Executive Assistant*  
*Georgia Secretary of State – Brad Raffensperger*  
214 State Capitol  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
470-312-2801 – office phone number  
470-572-7793 – cell number  
[dnealey@sos.ga.gov](mailto:dnealey@sos.ga.gov)

## Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)

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**From:** Germany, Ryan <rgermany@sos.ga.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, May 8, 2020 12:41 PM  
**To:** Schaffer, Ari; Brad Rigby; Stuchell, James (USAGAS; Shannon Wallace; BChristine@usa.doj.gov; Tasha Mosley; gedwards@dougherty.ga.us; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office); barry.morgan@cobbcounty.org; rszabo@pacga.org; Jennifer E. Logan; Christopher Channell  
**Cc:** Watson, Frances; Harvey, Chris; Rayburn, Kevin  
**Subject:** RE: Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force-New Poll Shows Majority Worried About Vote By Mail

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Thanks for sharing Ari. We will be in touch soon about setting up a first teleconference meeting to introduce everyone and give some background on the absentee voting process and laws in Georgia.

Thanks to everyone again for agreeing to help with this important issues, which is even more important than usual this year.

Ryan

--  
**C. Ryan Germany**  
*Georgia Secretary of State*  
Direct: 470-312-2808  
Cell: 678-672-9230  
[rgermany@sos.ga.gov](mailto:rgermany@sos.ga.gov)



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**From:** Schaffer, Ari  
**Sent:** Friday, May 8, 2020 12:35 PM  
**To:** Brad Rigby ; Stuchell, James (USAGAS ; Shannon Wallace ; BChristine@usa.doj.gov; Tasha Mosley ; gedwards@dougherty.ga.us; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office ; barry.morgan@cobbcounty.org; rszabo@pacga.org; Jennifer E. Logan ; Christopher Channell  
**Cc:** Watson, Frances ; Harvey, Chris ; Rayburn, Kevin ; Germany, Ryan  
**Subject:** Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force-New Poll Shows Majority Worried About Vote By Mail

Hi all,

How are you doing?

In case you get questions about the Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force, I wanted to make sure you saw a new poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies and commissioned by the Republican National Committee that shows "57% of voters say they are concerned for the integrity of elections because of ballots cast by mail" versus 21% who are "worried about in-person ballots."

A full write up is available here: <https://dailycaller.com/2020/05/08/republican-national-committee-survey-poll-majority-voters-mail-in-voting-election-fraud-2020/>

Other notable points:

- 84% support requiring signatures on mailed ballots to match those on file
- 80% agree with requiring some form of identification to ensure voter eligibility
- 83% want an absolute deadline by election for all mail ballots
- 62% percent of voters believe there is fraud in U.S. elections

The political affiliation of the 1,000 respondents for background purposes: 34% Democrat, 29% Republican and 37% lean/independent.

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Ari Schaffer  
Press Secretary  
Georgia Secretary of State  
404-304-3031



## Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)

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**From:** Germany, Ryan <rgermany@sos.ga.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 27, 2020 3:38 PM  
**To:** Brad Rigby; Stuchell, James (USAGAS); Shannon Wallace; BChristine@usa.doj.gov; Tasha Mosley; gedwards@dougherty.ga.us; Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office); barry.morgan@cobbcounty.org; rszabo@pacga.org; Jennifer E. Logan; Christopher Channell  
**Cc:** Watson, Frances; Harvey, Chris; Rayburn, Kevin; Schaffer, Ari  
**Subject:** Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force  
**Attachments:** 4.6.20 Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force-Final.docx

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All,

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Absentee Ballot Fraud Task Force. We are going to have record setting absentee voting this election, so the work of the task force will be crucial to ensuring all Georgians that our elections are free and fair. Our office will be releasing the names of the task force members in the attached press release later today or tomorrow. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or Ari Schaffer (our press secretary, [aschaffer@sos.ga.gov](mailto:aschaffer@sos.ga.gov)) with any questions.

We will be in touch on a first meeting.

Thanks,  
Ryan

--

**C. Ryan Germany**  
*General Counsel and Asst. Commissioner of Securities and Charities*  
*Georgia Secretary of State*  
Direct: 470-312-2808  
Cell: 678-672-9230  
[rgermany@sos.ga.gov](mailto:rgermany@sos.ga.gov)



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## Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)

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**From:** Germany, Ryan <rgermany@sos.ga.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 6, 2020 12:37 PM  
**To:** Stephanie Woodard (Solicitor's Office)  
**Cc:** Schaffer, Ari  
**Subject:** bio

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Stephanie,

Thanks for your time last week and agreeing to serve on the absentee ballot fraud task force. We'll be announcing the task force members in the next few days. Are you ok with the below brief bio? I have copied our press secretary, Ari Schaffer, and he can make any edits.

Thanks,  
Ryan

Hall County Solicitor General Stephanie Woodard: Stephanie Woodard was appointed Solicitor General for Hall County in December 2008. She previously worked in the Fulton County District Attorney's office as Senior Assistant District Attorney, in the Carroll County District Attorney's Office and in the DeKalb County Solicitor General's Office.

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**C. Ryan Germany**  
*General Counsel and Asst. Commissioner of Securities and Charities*  
*Georgia Secretary of State*  
Direct: 470-312-2808  
Cell: 678-672-9230  
[rgermany@sos.ga.gov](mailto:rgermany@sos.ga.gov)



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# Mail-vote fraud: Fear exceeds reality

State Election Board records show few cases of absentee ballot violations in Georgia since 2015.



*Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger created a task force to investigate fraud allegations.*  
AUSTIN STEELE / FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION



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**By Mark Niese**  
**mark.niese@ajc.com**

When Georgia moved toward mass mail-in voting for its primary, accusations of fraud quickly followed.

President Donald Trump said mailed ballots will be used to cheat. House Speaker David Ralston said absentee ballots could compromise election integrity. Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger created a task force to investigate fraud allegations.

Fears of widespread voting fraud aren't backed up by much evidence. There have been few cases of absentee ballot violations in Georgia since 2015, according to State Election Board records.



Fraud is rare, and when it does happen, it's small or unintentional: a mother voting for her daughter, election officials accepting several ballots without signatures, a woman who asked her friend to turn in a ballot.

The kind of absentee ballot tampering that would swing an election hasn't surfaced in Georgia since 2006, when a Chattooga County judge used runners to help voters fill out and deliver their ballots.

The most well-known cases of voting fraud, like when the campaign of a Republican North Carolina congressional candidate collected absentee ballots from hundreds of voters in 2018, overshadow a less shocking reality: Nearly all elections are free from manipulation.

"Absentee voting fraud is almost nonexistent in this state," said David Worley, a member of the State Election Board and a former chairman of the Democratic Party of Georgia. "We have had very few cases, which mainly involved persons returning absentee ballots that should not have done so, or that weren't allowed by statute to do so."

The specter of fraud arose after Raffensperger, a Republican, sent absentee ballot

applications to Georgia's 6.9 million active voters for the state's June 9 primary, vastly increasing the number of ballots that will be filled out far from the watchful eyes of poll workers. More than 1.3 million voters have requested absentee ballots so far.

Concerns generally fell along party lines, with Democrats worrying that voting security restrictions discourage turnout and Republicans emphasizing the need for election safeguards.

The people who manage elections, regardless of their political parties, say allegations of fraud are overblown.

But mailed ballots are more vulnerable than in-person votes, said State Election Board member Matthew Mashburn, who worked for years as a Republican Party poll watcher.

"The more you move people away from the protection of the bubble in the precinct, the more you're opening them up to intimidation and interference in the dark, in secret and in privacy," Mashburn said. "I'm more worried about voter intimidation and harassment than massive efforts at widespread fraud."

Election workers verify absentee ballots by comparing voters' signatures with their signatures from when they registered to vote, said Darin McCoy, a probate judge who runs elections in Evans County in southeast Georgia.

They also check the information voters wrote on the ballot envelope and ensure it matches voter registration records.

"It's a very, very small number of ballots that are fraudulently returned," McCoy said.

"The biggest area would be a voter turning their ballot over to someone else to vote.

There's no way to ever control that."

Absentee ballot violations are usually minor in Georgia, according to State Election Board transcripts reviewed by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

It's uncommon — but not unheard of — to find allegations of double voting or ballot harvesting, which is an organized effort to collect and mail absentee ballots.

Of hundreds of cases heard by the State Election Board during the past five years, 34 of them involved absentee ballots. The most common allegations involved failures by county election officials to process absentee ballots correctly by inappropriately rejecting them.

- Ten cases involved inappropriate assistance, such as when hospital staff mailed ballots for patients or wives helped their husbands fill out their ballots without disclosing they had done so.
- In one case, 256 absentee ballot applications were faxed from the same phone number, prompting Raffensperger to remark, "It's a record-breaker for me." That case is under investigation by the attorney general's office.
- A Lumpkin County man moved to North Carolina and voted there, then also mailed an absentee ballot to Georgia.
- There was one allegation of a dead person voting, when a Paulding County man cast a vote for his deceased spouse.

Violators are typically fined \$100 per incident of improper absentee ballot handling. The State Election Board can levy fines up to \$5,000.

Raffensperger launched his voting fraud task force after Republican leaders such as Trump and Ralston heaped skepticism on absentee ballots, which will be used by voters seeking to avoid human contact at voting precincts during the coronavirus pandemic.

The task force, mostly made up of Republican prosecutors, will investigate allegations of fraud, including mismatched signatures, multiple voters at the same address and voters who use nonresidential addresses.

"We want a strong, robust, accurate and secure absentee ballot program so both sides of the aisle feel that they know that no one's right has been diminished," Raffensperger said.

Former Secretary of State Cathy Cox, a Democrat, said voter fraud is so rare that the only purpose of Raffensperger's task force will be to discourage voters from using absentee ballots to participate in the election.

"If a county official says my signature doesn't match, is this task force going to show up with guns and badges at my office or my home?" Cox asked. "I have to believe it's a strategy that's being used to intimidate voters, not to really address a problem, because there is no problem."

Voting fraud accusations have been used against people who weren't found to have done anything wrong, as in 2010 when then-Secretary of State Brian Kemp's office investigated an election in Quitman, in Brooks County.

After an organized absentee ballot effort helped African American candidates win a majority on the county school board, investigators questioned more than 400 voters.

Of the 10 people initially arrested and two people later charged with crimes, none of the group known as the Quitman 10+2 was found guilty.

"Traditionally in the United States, and in Georgia as well, protestations of voter fraud have been used as an excuse for restricting access to the ballot box," said Wendy Weiser, the director for the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, a policy institute at New York University that focuses on democracy and criminal justice. "There's a real concern that this debate is a pretext for justifying restrictions on voting or for trying to delegitimize outcomes."

Both Democrats and Republicans agree that absentee ballots are riskier than in-person ballots.

"In-person voting fraud is very rare, and mail ballot voting fraud is also very rare, it's just a little less rare," said Charles Stewart III, a political science professor at the



Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"It's easier for your spouse to take your ballot from you and send it back than it is at a polling place."

Voting by mail increases the potential that ballots won't be counted because of mistakes, delays or errors, said Michael Thielen, the executive director for the Republican National Lawyers Association.

"All but the most strident Democrat activists agree fraud is easiest and most common with absentee or mail ballots,"

Thielen said. "Even Democrats who claim that fraud is a myth recognize that absentee ballots are extremely vulnerable to fraud and voter coercion."

Any registered voter has been allowed to cast an absentee ballot in Georgia without having to provide an excuse since 2005. This year's primary is different because most voters are expected to vote by mail. In past elections, about 95% of voters cast their ballots in person.

About 3% of absentee ballots were rejected in the 2018 general election, usually because they were returned after election day, voter information was missing or signatures didn't match. Voters can check the status of their absentee ballot online on the state's My Voter Page.

But the potential for fraud doesn't necessarily mean it will happen in Georgia and other states that are relying on absentee voting because of the coronavirus, said Lorraine Minnite, who wrote "The Myth of Voter Fraud" in 2010.

"People who vote by mail don't have any greater motive to commit fraud than those in a polling place," said Minnite, a public policy professor at Rutgers University-Camden.

"Most of the time elections are not won by one vote, so from the perspective of the individual voter there isn't a lot to be gained by committing a crime by forging somebody's absentee ballot or voting when you're not eligible to vote."



It would take a criminal conspiracy to rig most elections.

Local elections with low turnout would be more vulnerable than major elections decided by tens of thousands of votes.

Still, concerns about election fixing aren't entirely baseless given Georgia's history of stolen and altered elections.

When Jimmy Carter ran for the state Senate in 1962, more votes were reported than people who had cast a ballot, and 117 ballots were cast in alphabetical order of voters' names.

There were no absentee ballots in that race. Carter won after a judge ordered a new election.

In a more recent case in Dodge County, votes were openly bought and sold in a 1996 election, and the number of absentee ballots was much larger than normal. The case, called at the time the largest election fraud prosecution in modern history, resulted in more than two dozen convictions and jail time for a county commissioner and sheriff.

It's illegal in Georgia for anyone to mail absentee ballots besides voters, family members or people living in their household. Voters with disabilities can use a caregiver to deliver their ballots.

Elected officials should focus on improving voting access instead of wasting energy on low numbers of fraud cases, said Cindy Battles, program coordinator for Common Cause Georgia, a government accountability organization.

"It's not actual or real," Battles said. "We would be lying if we said fraud never happens.

All I'm trying to say is it doesn't happen nearly as much as certain political officials try to make out like it does."

# Over 1 million Georgia voters request absentee ballots

A huge response to state's mail-in initiative during coronavirus pandemic.



*Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger (right) gives a wave as he walks to the podium before a state Capitol press conference to announce that more than 1 million Georgia voters have requested absentee ballots.*

*PHOTOS BY HYOSUB SHIN / HYOSUB.SHIN@AJC.COM*



1/2



**By Mark Niesse**  
**mark.niesse@ajc.com**

**AJC TOP STORY: CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK**

**ELECTIONS**

The number of Georgia voters requesting absentee ballots crossed 1 million Thursday, a tremendous increase in people planning to vote from home amid challenges to make polling places safe.

GA-HALL-20-2468-A-000017

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said voters responded to his initiative to increase absentee voting for the June 9 primary.

He mailed absentee ballot request forms to Georgia's 6.9 million active voters, encouraging them to avoid voting in person at precincts during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We can now see that effort is exceeding far past our own aspirations," Raffensperger said during a press conference outside the state Capitol. "Today we are passing the 1 million mark in absentee ballot requests. That is unprecedented."

More than 994,000 people had returned forms requesting absentee-by-mail ballots through Wednesday, according to data from the secretary of state's office. So far, just 13,694 ballots have been returned and accepted by county election offices after they began to be mailed to voters last week.

The quick ramp-up in absentee voting during the coronavirus has created some problems.

Absentee ballot packages no longer include a white inside envelope for voters to secure their ballots because of a miscommunication between Georgia election officials and their ballot printing company, Runbeck Election Services. Instead, voters are given a folded piece of paper that doesn't protect ballot secrecy in the same way

GA-HALL-20-2468-A-000018

as a sealed envelope.

Ballots also list the incorrect election date because they were created before the primary was postponed to June 9. Ballots still show a May 19 election date.

Raffensperger said those issues won't stop voters from casting their ballots.

The number of absentee ballots requested could exceed 1.5 million or even 2 million, he said. Most voters are expected to vote by mail after about 5% of voters did so in most prior elections, Raffensperger said.

Georgia has allowed anyone to cast an absentee ballot without having to provide an excuse since 2005.

Voters can safeguard their ballots by taping the folded paper on three sides, which Raffensperger said makes it equivalent to the inner envelope required by state law.

In-person voting will also move forward when early voting begins May 18 and on election day, according to state law.

Raffensperger said his office has purchased 33,000 face masks that will be distributed to poll workers. In addition, counties can request federal coronavirus relief money to reimburse their protective equipment costs.

"Georgians are safer and their right to vote is protected,"

Raffensperger said.

"Obviously, voters have seen the need for this and responded accordingly."

Fair Fight Action, a voting rights group founded by Democrat Stacey Abrams, criticized Raffensperger for the rollout of absentee voting and his recent creation of a task force to investigate voting fraud.

"Voters need safe mail and in-person options to vote," Fair Fight Action spokesman

Seth Bringman said. "By refusing to pay for postage, intimidating voters with a sham 'fraud' task force and rejecting ballot applications based on junk science, Secretary Raffensperger is bowing to his White House overlords by making it harder to vote."

More voters have requested Republican ballots than Democratic ballots, 527,000 to 433,000, according to state data.

About 33,000 voters requested nonpartisan ballots.