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Public Comment on HB 3006

Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. Even amidst a national pandemic, it is crucial that we maintain fair and accessible elections. We applaud the Utah legislature for having the foresight to enact universal vote by mail in our state long before it became such an essential option for voters during this public health crisis. However, while the state and local government must take steps to protect the health and safety of voters and poll workers, we are concerned that HB 3006 will disproportionately disenfranchise low income voters, voters needing language and other assistance, rural voters and indigenous voters by eliminating in-person polling. The following essential provisions would help mitigate these disparities, which we urge Utah legislators to include in HB 3006:

- 1. Provide pre-paid return postage for all mail ballots.** No one should have to choose between their health and their right to vote. Utahns who are sick or at risk of contracting COVID-19 shouldn't have to risk going to the post office for a stamp. Especially in the absence of in-person voting, vote by mail must be easy and absolutely free of charge. 16 other states already require that prepaid return postage be provided with mail ballots. This time of crisis is the crucial moment to reexamine and remove the poll tax associated with vote by mail in Utah.
- 2. Require counties to offer mobile voting on Election Day and allow for counties to offer early mobile voting days.** In-person voting is a necessary option for many Utahns who can't rely on vote by mail. Low income voters are less likely to have a current address on file to receive a mail ballot. Rural and Indigenous voters in our state must navigate lack of street addresses and unreliable or slow mail service. Under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, San Juan County is required to provide language translation and voting information in Navajo. Since Navajo is a historically unwritten language, vote by mail leaves behind the many voters in the county who primarily speak this language. The county can only truly fulfill its duty under the Voting Rights Act through in-person services. The Navajo Nation extends into states that border our own, and our neighbors in states like New Mexico are problem solving ways to provide safe, in-person voting for people who need translation services. Mobile voting could prove a great, safer alternative to in-person polling, but it must be equally and easily accessible across the state. Allowing early mobile voting will help ensure that counties are not overwhelmed on Election Day and greatly increase access to the ballot.

3. **Require that county clerks provide timely notice via multiple methods of contact for any voters whose ballots are found to have a defect and provide remote options for voters to cure any defects found with their mail in ballots. In the case of a ballot rejected due to a mismatched signature, clerks must mail the appropriate affidavit (with return postage included) to the voter that will allow the voter to verify their signature remotely, or the clerk must contact the voter over the phone to verify their signature. We can expect that many voters will turn to vote by mail in this time of public health crisis. In order for Utahns to maintain confidence in their elections, they must be assured that their mail ballot will have the same likelihood of being counted as if they had voted in person.**

During this time of National crisis, we maintain hope that Utah can still have fair, accessible elections. Utah has been a national leader in implementing vote by mail and we believe that with these few simple additions to HB 3006, lawmakers can take significant steps towards protecting the voting rights of all eligible Utahns.