



# CITY OF HOUSTON

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The Honorable Stephanie Klick  
Chair, House Elections Committee  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Dear Members of the House Elections Committee,

Texas is one of only nine states that does not allow online voter registration. Online registration would save money, increase the accuracy of voter rolls, and provide a safe, convenient option for Texans who wish to register or update their information.

In this time of pandemic concerns, in-person voter registration efforts have been virtually eliminated. According to the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation and Research, voter registration has dropped 24 percent in Texas since the beginning of the year compared with the same period in 2016. The effect is being felt across the political spectrum. According to the Texas Tribune, Democratic- and Republican-leaning groups say they're struggling with voter registration in the era of COVID-19:

- The Republican-leaning super PAC, Engage Texas, had raised almost \$12 million by February and had hired nearly 300 staff members with the goal of registering hundreds of thousands of new likely Republican voters before the 2020 elections. The PAC shut down by May, citing challenges created by the coronavirus.
- Democratic-leaning Powered by People were mobilizing for in-person registration efforts, only to find they can't go door to door. Now they are resorting to virtual phone banks.

Online registration is secure. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, validation is done by comparing the information on the online registration form against the information provided by the same individual when he or she received a driver's license or other state-issued identification card. The signature already on record with the state becomes the signature on record for voting. When the information does not match, the application is sent to officials for further review or action.

Several approaches are used to ensure system security and prevent fraud or breaches by hackers:

- The registrant provides his or her driver's license number or the last four digits of a Social Security number, information that others will not have.

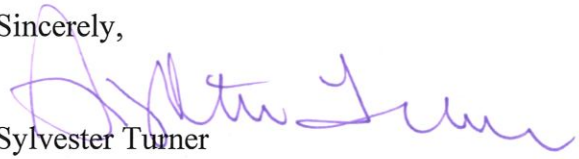
- Systems often include “captcha” boxes, where registrants must decode images that a computer cannot decode, to prevent hacking by programmers.
- Data is encrypted and data logs highlight unusual activity that can be investigated.
- Multi-screen systems, that offer just one question on a screen, are harder to hack.
- Most states require citizens to submit unique identifiers linking the applicant to his or her motor vehicle record in order to access the online registration system.
- Most states require a citizen to have a record and, importantly, a signature on file with the motor vehicle agency.

Finally, online registration saves money. According to the 2010 report, Online Voter Registration: Arizona (the first state to allow online registration) saw a reduction in per-registration costs from 83 cents for paper registration to 3 cents per online registration. California experienced even more dramatic cost reductions according to the Pew Charitable Trusts, with an estimated savings of \$2.34 per online registration—or about \$2 million—compared with paper processing costs.

Texas came close to passing online voter registration legislation recently. A majority of Texas House members co-sponsored a bipartisan bill in 2015.

It is past time to bring back this commonsense measure. In an era when we securely do everything from banking to telemedicine online, there is simply no reason to delay any longer.

Sincerely,



Sylvester Turner  
Mayor