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September 23, 2020

The Honorable Alex Padilla
California Secretary of State
1500 11th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Padilla,

I write today concerned that some of California's nursing home residents, who have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, may have additional difficulties casting their vote this November¹. I urge you to ensure our state's nursing homes and assisted living facilities have the tools they need – including updated guidance in light of the global pandemic—so that all can successfully vote in this upcoming election.

In my district, COVID-19 hit nursing homes early and hard². Ninety-two of the first hundred COVID-19 related deaths in Stanislaus County were in nursing homes³. Residents living in these facilities have been isolated for months, unable to visit with their loved ones and communities in the middle of this pandemic. Now—with limited access to their support network—my constituents are facing a vote-by-mail program that many are unfamiliar with.

The circumstances of this year's election will have many voters mailing in their ballots for the first time in our nation's history. Unintended errors on a ballot can get a ballot rejected. In this year's primary alone, over 100,000 mail-in-ballots were disqualified due to mistakes as simple as forgetting a middle initial in their signature⁴. That's why there must be active educational outreach on the part of election officials to nursing home residents on signature matching, mailing and tracking their ballot, the existing deadlines, and verifying that their vote was counted. These voter education efforts must be made in both English and Spanish and available across California.

I also urge attention to be focused on residents that require Remote Accessible Vote-By-Mail (RAVBM) ballots. In the case of RAVBM ballots, I'm worried that disabled residents may lack the support to clear the extra hurdles to vote. Unlike with the typical mail-in-ballot, RAVBM ballots must be requested from the County Elections Office, then they must be filled out on the

¹ *ProPublica*, Ryan McCarthy and Jack Gillum, "[Hundreds of Thousands of Nursing Home Residents May Not Be Able to Vote in November Because of the Pandemic](#)," August 26, 2020.

² *The Modesto Bee*, Kristin Lam, "[Stanislaus County passes milestone in COVID-19 cases tied to skilled nursing facilities](#)", August 18, 2020

³ [Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors Meeting](#), August 11, 2020

⁴ *Associated Press*, Michael Blood, "[California rejected 100K mail-in ballots because of mistakes](#)," July 13, 2020

voter's own computer using assistive technology, printed, and mailed back. This requires access to digital resources that some residents may not have.

This is not a partisan issue. The population hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic should not also be disenfranchised by it. As a public servant, I owe it to my constituents that their voices will be heard in this election. Thank you for your leadership on this issue and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Josh Harder

United States Representative (CA-10)