

Candidates Seeking the Offices of Mayor of Boston
and Boston City Councilor At Large

Delivered by Email

April 20, 2021

William F. Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Michelle K. Tassinari, Director and Legal Counsel, Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth
Senator Barry R. Finegold, Chair, Joint Committee on Election Laws
Representative Daniel J. Ryan, Chair, Joint Committee on Election Laws

Dear Secretary Galvin, Chairs Finegold and Ryan, and Director Tassinari,

We are candidates currently seeking the offices of Mayor of Boston and Boston City Councilor At Large. Although we are candidates for different offices -- and, in some instances, are competing against one another -- we are joined by the common desire to participate safely in the democratic process.

Our ability to campaign for office and access the ballot in a manner consistent with public health is currently undermined by state laws requiring us to collect a high number of "in person" signatures in order to appear on ballots in the City of Boston. While this is a statewide issue, we are most acutely burdened by the current laws, given the high number of signatures (3,000 for mayoral candidates, 1,500 for Council candidates) we need to collect to reach the ballot.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic renders in-person signature collection dangerous to public health. As the Supreme Judicial Court found in an opinion last spring, asking candidates and campaigns to engage with large numbers of individuals at close quarters to collect signatures poses a public health risk and increases the likelihood of infection with the deadly virus that causes COVID-19.

There is no reason that this state of affairs should exist. While the Supreme Judicial Court's action last year provided relief to candidates who sought office in last year's election cycle, no such relief is available to candidates for office this year, despite the persistence of the pandemic. Signature collection efforts are due to commence imminently; urgent relief is needed.

Consistent with the resolution that unanimously passed the Boston City Council on April 14, 2021, we are writing to call on you to exercise your legislative and administrative authority as officeholders to address this threat to our public health and the proper functioning of our democracy.

There are a number of steps that are squarely within your authority which would make a difference:

1. The Legislature could pass a law temporarily reducing the number of signatures needed to be gathered to reach the ballot;
2. The Legislature could endorse home rule petitions enabling communities to introduce greater flexibility in ballot access and signature collection requirements; and
3. Secretary Galvin could promulgate regulations permitting the electronic collection of signatures, as was permitted last year pursuant to the Supreme Judicial Court's order.

Each of these steps would alleviate the burdens currently imposed on candidates seeking to access the ballot this year. Taken together, they would vastly improve the ability of Massachusetts citizens to safely participate in the democratic process, despite the ongoing pandemic.

We sincerely appreciate the work that you, along with city and town clerks, including the Boston Elections Department, have already done in navigating the challenging election administration dynamics brought about by the pandemic. Last year, your efforts to allow candidates to collect signatures electronically placed the Commonwealth at the forefront of a movement to ensure our democracy remains fair and accessible during a pandemic. This year, we hope you will continue that legacy, consistent with the proposals outlined in this letter.

We look forward to continuing this conversation.

Respectfully yours,

Candidates for Mayor of Boston:



John Barros



Councilor Andrea Campbell



Councilor Annissa Essaibi George



Mayor Kim Janey



Representative Jon Santiago

Candidates for City Council, At Large:



Kelly Bates



Councilor Michael Flaherty



Alex Gray



David Halbert



Councilor Julia Mejia