

Post-Election Messaging Recommendations for Local Leaders

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Integrity, Trust, and Patience

Leaders in cities and towns across Vermont will play a central role in communicating the importance of calm and patience to their residents in the event of any delays or irregularities in the election results once the polls close on Election Day. VLCT suggests that leaders focus their messaging around the following themes to ensure that anxieties over the results of the election do not boil over into civil unrest in their communities.

Integrity of the Process

- Voting by mail has proven to be secure, trusted and effective for many years, and there is no reason to cast doubt on the validity of the election results simply because we

witnessed an increase in Americans voting by mail this year to avoid exposure to large crowds and lines during the current pandemic.

- Before 2020, five states already conducted elections almost entirely by mail, with no negative consequences or cases of voter fraud or irregularities, and Vermont, along with 42 other states, offered no-excuse absentee voting this election cycle.
- Mail-in voting is not only a preferable option for voters wishing to stay safe and avoid crowds during a global pandemic, it is also more secure than other forms of in-person voting, such as electronic voting machines, because voters have a guarantee that there will be a verifiable and auditable paper trail in the event of any irregularities that require a recount of ballots.
- Over the past 20 years, there have been only 143 cases of voter fraud through mail-in ballots, amounting to less than a tenth of a tenth of a percent of all ballots cast.
- Voters can be confident that, even with the increased volume of mail-in ballots, election officials have the tools and procedures in place to verify the accuracy of the results and ensure each ballot is counted accurately.

Seek Trusted Information from Local Officials

- Due to the contentious nature of this year's election, there has been a lot of misinformation casting doubt on the integrity of the electoral process.
- Leaders in towns and cities in Vermont depend on close coordination and information sharing with local and state election officials to ensure that voters receive accurate information about any delays or irregularities in reporting election results.
- Whether there are deliberate campaigns to spread misinformation about election results or inadvertent misreporting by the media, voters should always contact local officials or the Secretary of State's Office for verified information.
- Officials at the local and state levels all have a vested interest in ensuring the integrity of our electoral system and can be trusted to provide information in a transparent manner so that the voting public can be aware of the status of any delays or irregularities in the election results.
- In the event of any problems that arise after polls close on Election Day, city and town clerks are prepared to provide any resources that state election officials need to review the ballot tabulation process and ensure all eligible votes are counted and reported accurately.

- For accurate and up-to-date information, voters are always encouraged to check their official town website or electionresults.vermont.gov, the official website run by the Vermont Secretary of State.
- In Vermont, clerks, supervisors of the checklist and volunteers at polling places are neighbors and friends. They do and have done a tremendous public service for all registered voters, backed by the Secretary of State's office and deserve our thanks and respect for doing well what they know best.

Urging Calm and Patience

- Our Democracy is not broken simply because the ballot counting process may take longer this year due to the pandemic and an increase in mail-in ballots cast.
- Reports of irregularities are not cause for alarm or an indication of malevolent behavior – they are issues that are resolved by local election officials working together in a transparent manner to ensure that elections have been conducted properly.
- We continue to urge all voters and residents to remain calm, seek trusted information from their local officials, and exercise patience in the electoral process – which includes layers of safeguards to ensure the votes are collected, counted and reported accurately.
- Local leaders implore voters to honor the spirit of our Democracy by continuing to make their voices heard in a peaceful manner as we await the final results of the election.
- This year is unprecedented in many ways, but it is not uncommon for local election officials to exercise diligence and care in processing and counting ballots.
- The sheer volume of mail-in ballots cast this year will mean local election officials need more time, and leaders ask voters to respect the integrity of our democratic process by providing them the trust and patience they deserve to ensure the results are reported accurately.
- All American voters have a sacred right to make their voices heard at the ballot box and determine the future of our great nation.]
- Likewise, voters have every right to peacefully speak out against injustices and petition for reform.

Addressing Voter Intimidation, Suppression and Racial Equity

- Rest assured that, local leaders in Vermont will use every resource at our disposal to hold accountable those responsible for voter suppression and intimidation activities, and

justice will be served to ensure the disenfranchisement of voters does not happen in any of our communities.

- Generations before us have fought for universal suffrage for all U.S. citizens, and it is our job as town and city leaders to use the resources we have to ensure safety and security at the polls, and to ensure every voter is free to cast a ballot free from intimidation.
- While we must respect all residents' First Amendment right to free speech, we must also ensure that voters are able to freely exercise their right to cast a ballot in this election.
- There is no question that voter suppression in our country has historically and disproportionately impacted communities of color.
- As Vermont community leaders, our duty and responsibility must always be to help facilitate voting for all eligible voters in our communities, and to tear down the barriers that prevent Americans from making their voices heard at the polls.
- As city and town leaders, we work with the city and town clerks responsible for administration of elections to ensure voters have every resource and opportunity to make their voices heard at the polls, and we work swiftly to eradicate any obstacles that disenfranchise voters.
- Reports of voter suppression in the election are not only disturbing, but undermine the very foundation of our Democracy – that every eligible U.S. citizen have an equal voice in the future of our nation.

Responding to Protests & Violence in Cities

- Divisive rhetoric and threats undermine the peaceful transition of power that is at the very heart of American democracy.
- As town and city leaders, we support all Americans' constitutional rights to speak freely, to peacefully assemble, and to petition public leaders for reform.
- Where protests are peaceful, it is our job as municipal leaders to make sure we are facilitating free, open, and peaceful expression.
- Where protests turn violent and threaten to harm our residents and inflict damage upon our communities, local law enforcement officials are prepared to take appropriate steps to protect our residents from those who seek to incite violence and wreak havoc.
- Political efforts by federal and state governments to undermine the authority of local law enforcement not only risk escalating tensions and creating more violence, but also infringe on the autonomy of local jurisdictions to handle matters of law enforcement at

the local level.

- Municipal leaders know our communities best, and we are best positioned to handle any unrest that may arise in our communities with the assistance of the state police in Vermont.
- We welcome healthy and constructive partnership between all levels of government to respond to public safety challenges our communities are facing.

Let's be sure that Vermont leads the nation with its calm and thoughtful response to the election, communicating with one another through respectful civil discourse.

Thank you to the National League of Cities for providing the basis for these recommendations.