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Interview with Leon County Supervisor of Elections Mark Earley

In anticipation of the upcoming election, the Claude Pepper Center had the privilege to interview Leon County Supervisor of Elections Mark Earley and ask him about topics that were of particular interest to our elder population. We have chosen to highlight parts of the interview in an abridged, edited form, but we encourage you to visit our website and [read the full transcript](#) as there is significant insight and information provided therein.

With the coronavirus pandemic a core concern of many Americans, we asked Supervisor Earley about what steps they have taken to reduce health risks to our elders in the upcoming election, and how they have made voting safer for all Leon County voters. He told us his main advice is “don't wait until election day to vote”. Take the opportunity to vote early (October 19 - November 1) or vote by mail, both of which will help you avoid potentially long lines at polling locations on election day. “Instead of about 70% of our voting happening either at an early voting site or on election day in a polling site, about 60% is now done vote by mail, and so that really leaves only 40% of the voters to vote in one of those early voting or election day opportunities. That dramatically decreases the load, which improves social distance.”

If you choose to vote on Election Day, Leon County still has you covered! In addition to following CDC guidelines and making sure that all surfaces are kept sanitized, the Supervisor's office is also providing personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks, and sanitizer to any voter who requests it at the polling locations. For those who choose to vote in person, he recommended looking at the sample ballot contained within the election guide mailed to all registered voters ahead of time to understand all the amendments and candidate options before you go to a polling location, which would allow the voter to “be in and out of that polling site very quickly and efficiently just to minimize your exposure” to other voters.

One group that faces extra difficulty this election are voters who live in congregate housing like nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Supervisor Earley states “We used to go into assisted living sites or assisted living facilities, and we would bring groups of voters into their meeting rooms. And we would (me and my staff) would help voters go ahead and cast their ballots, and we would go to roughly 20 or more assisted living facilities all throughout the county, and do this before every single election. Certainly with the pandemic the restrictions on who is allowed into the assisted living facilities and really even some of these aggregate housing situations, like some of the elderly, apartment communities, the access has been somewhat more limited.” Vote by mail is one of the options available for these communities, and the Supervisor has offered to work with the communities to help in any way he can, and is allowed to, within their pandemic protocols.

Supervisor Earley says that if any voter in Leon County has any questions, “call my office: we’re the most trusted source of information when it comes to what's really true about elections, and that number is 850-606-8683. And we welcome voters to call. We love helping people, and that's why we're in the business we're in.”

Leon County Vote-By-Mail

In Leon County, you do not have to mail back your ballot, you can instead drop it off at the Supervisor’s office or at over a dozen secure drop boxes in the county. The status of your ballot can also be tracked online at [leonvotes.org](https://www.leonvotes.org). If you have any questions about the status of your vote by mail ballot you can also reach the Supervisor of Elections office at 850-606-8683.

Election Day is November 3rd

For Election Day updates regarding any polling locations that are closed or moved due to emergency, or any other delays or issues, you can find that information on local news and radio stations, or for Leon County, on social media at:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LeonVotes>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/leonvotes>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/leonvotes/>