



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **The Barristers' Joins Fight on Behalf of PA Voters Seeking Mail-In Ballot Extension Due to COVID-19**

Because extraordinary circumstances have collided with continued concerns of social inequity, The Barristers' Association of Philadelphia, Inc. announced its participation in the lawsuit filed by the Public Interest Law Center challenging Pennsylvania's statute governing mail-in voting in light of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-2019).

"We shouldn't have to choose between our health and our vote," said Barristers President David C. Williams. "We have elderly, pregnant, and otherwise vulnerable loved ones to consider. As Black lawyers of conscience, we could not stand on the sidelines of this fight.

"We are on the front lines in this pandemic—as first responders, healthcare professionals, postal workers, cashiers, couriers, custodians, and waste management professionals, among others. There should be no compromise when it comes to being able to safely choose the policymakers who will directly impact our lives—in more ways than one," Williams added.

Pennsylvania's no-excuse-needed mail-in ballot system, available for the first time this year, is now a vital tool to protect public health as the Commonwealth battles COVID-19. But the rules for voting by mail were written for a pre-pandemic world. Pennsylvania currently requires that mail-in ballots be received by Election Day, not simply postmarked by that date.

Voters who are most at risk for contracting COVID-19 fear that the mail-in voting deadlines currently in effect could leave them disenfranchised—even if they follow all the rules.

With the COVID-19 crisis as a backdrop, more than 600,000 Pennsylvania voters have requested a mail-in or absentee ballot for the June 2nd primary election—potentially overburdening the ability to ensure that all mail-in ballots arrive by Election Day.

Williams pointed to persistent, systemic inequity in access to health care and economic opportunity that leave African Americans far more vulnerable to the virus—a view echoed by national leaders fighting the pandemic.

In Pennsylvania, African Americans comprise 31 percent of the persons who have contracted COVID-19, despite representing just 12 percent of the total population.

As well as Barristers, Disability Rights Pennsylvania, the SeniorLAW Center, the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition (SEAMAAC), and voter Suzanne Erb joined in the lawsuit filed by the Public Interest Law Center and pro bono co-counsel from Arnold & Porter challenging Pennsylvania's statute governing mail-in voting.

Founded in 1950, Barristers is one of the largest and oldest associations of Black lawyers in America. Since its earliest days, Barristers has committed to protecting the hard-earned right of Black citizens to vote and to fighting electoral devices which unduly burden, deny, dilute or suppress their right to vote.

A copy of the complaint may be accessed at <https://www.pubintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20.04.27-mail-in-ballot-Petition-for-Review-pubintl.pdf>

#### **ABOUT THE BARRISTERS' ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA, INC.**

The Barristers' Association of Philadelphia, Inc., an affiliate of the National Bar Association, encompasses over 1,000 attorneys who serve in private and public sectors of the legal profession. Visit [www.phillybarristers.com](http://www.phillybarristers.com); email [phillybarristers@gmail.com](mailto:phillybarristers@gmail.com); follow us @BarristersPA.