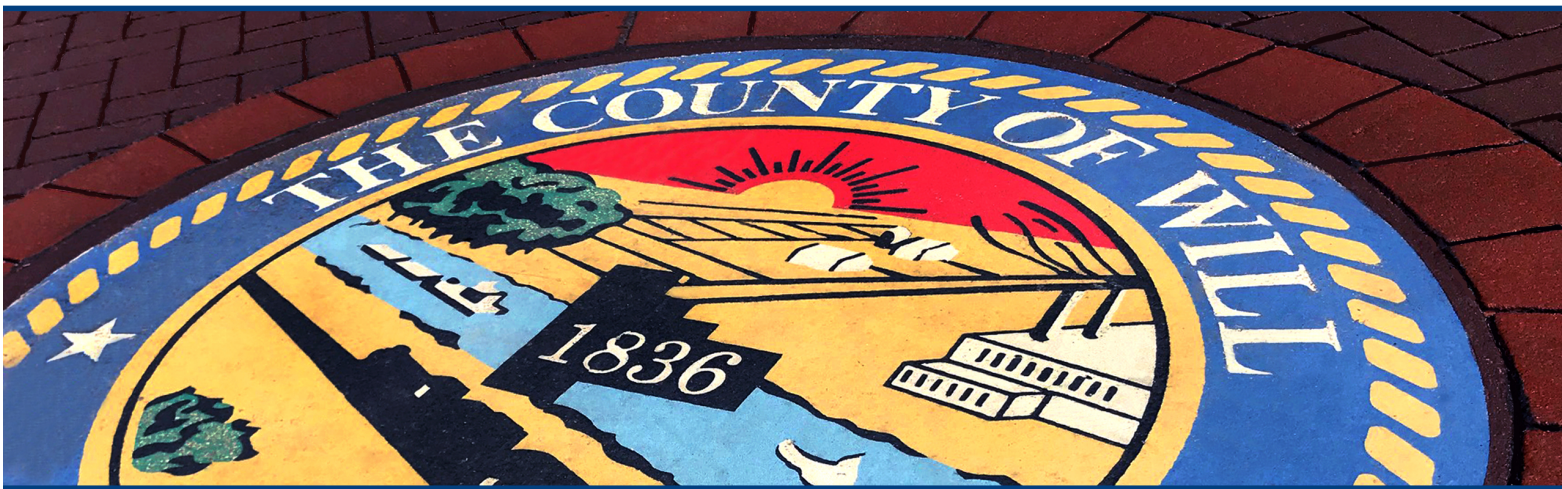


**LAUREN STALEY FERRY**  
**WILL COUNTY CLERK**



# **2020/2021**

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# **ELECTIONS REPORT**

**Published by: Lauren Staley Ferry, Will County Clerk**

2020/2021 Elections Report - Published September 15, 2021

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# **Voting During A Pandemic:** **COVID-19's Impact on the 2020 Primary Election, 2020 Presidential Election, and the 2021 Consolidated Election**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic and its extended grip on our Nation exerted a profound impact on our last three elections: the March 17, 2020 Presidential Primary Election; the November 3, 2020 Presidential Election; and the April 6, 2021 Consolidated Election. The prolonged public health crisis affected every aspect of these elections, testing the endurance, expertise, creativity, and flexibility of the County Clerk's employees in every department as they grappled with Polling Place relocations, Election Judge cancellations, public health safety protocols, and community concerns about voting access and security. Possibly the greatest impact was experienced in our Vote By Mail Department as our team dealt with quickly passed state legislation that mandated sweeping procedural changes and drove an unprecedented expansion in absentee voting during the 2020 Presidential Election.

This report breaks down and summarizes the major facets of these elections. The goal is to detail staff deployment decisions, procedural challenges, significant purchases, and major initiatives associated with three elections that were conducted under the most extraordinary circumstances. Our goal is to increase transparency and provide the public with the clearest possible understanding of our election process.

Of equal importance, it is hoped this report conveys the professionalism, commitment, tenacity, and ingenuity of our Will County Clerk staff members who worked each day during this pandemic, including weekends and holidays. They set aside their own concerns over potential health risks to facilitate ballot access for every Will County voter. While other government offices across the state were shutting doors and reducing staff, the Will County Clerk's employees were tightening their masks, disinfecting counters, social distancing, and washing their hands raw to prepare for these elections. They were joined in their efforts by a dedicated team of Election Judges, Student Ambassadors, and Election Workers whose assistance proved invaluable and will be outlined later in this report.

# IMPORTANT ELECTION INITIATIVES

Will County Clerk Lauren Staley Ferry launched many successful election-related initiatives prior to and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. These improvements should not be overshadowed by the public health crisis.

## Restyled Voter Information Guide

The County Clerk overhauled the Voter Information Guide that provides important election-related information, including sample ballots, to every Will County household with a registered voter. Information in the popular guide was reorganized to make it more accessible and easy to understand. The sleek new look enabled the Clerk to reduce the size of the guide, mailed to more than 200,000 households prior to each election. The streamlined format and reduced size also has allowed the County Clerk to fit all election information on one sheet. This will save an estimated \$38,000 in postage during Primary Elections that in the past required a second sheet to accommodate additional sample ballots.

## Streamlined Voter Registration Cards

Restructured content enabled the County Clerk to reduce the size of the card by half, cutting postage from 45.9 cents to 28 cents per card at the time of the redesign. Savings on two mandatory mailings of 450,000 cards each (900,000 total) was estimated to be \$161,000.

**LAUREN STALEY FERRY**  
WILL COUNTY CLERK  
302 N. CHICAGO STREET, JOLIET, IL 60432  
Date of Issue: 01/15/2021 Precinct: JOLIET PCT 005

DOE, JANE A  
302 N CHICAGO ST  
JOLIET IL 60432  
1.0000000

*Jane A. Doe*  
SIGNATURE OF VOTER

**POLLING PLACE**  
SECOND BAPTIST CHURCH  
158 S JOLIET ST

Eligible Voting Districts: Tax Code: 3011  
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY/TWP 12TH SUB-CIRCUIT DIST 2  
CITY OF JOLIET-DIST 5 JOLIET PUB SCH DIST 80-EAST  
JOLIET PARK JOLIET TOWNSHIP HS 204  
JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE 525

CONGRESSIONAL 11 STATE SENATE 43 REPRESENTATIVE 86 COUNTY BOARD 8

TO:  
JANE A DOE  
14 W JEFFERSON ST  
JOLIET IL 60432

First-Class  
PRST  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Joliet, IL  
Permit No. 399

OFFICIAL  
ELECTION MAIL  
Authorized by the U.S. Postal Service

RETURN SERVICE  
REQUESTED

## Expanded Early Voting

The County Clerk followed through on a commitment to expand Early Voting locations by bringing on board the Spanish Community Center (Joliet), the Louis Sherman Community Center (Steger), Plainfield Activity & Recreation Center (Plainfield), and the Village of Shorewood (Shorewood).

The Plainfield and Shorewood locations stopped serving after the 2020 Primary due to COVID-19 concerns.

## Redesigned Website

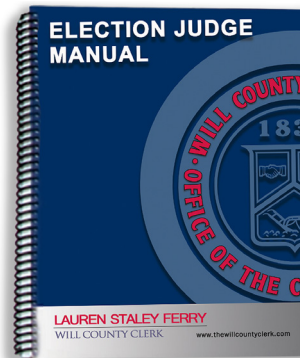
The County Clerk modernized the website [willcountyclerk.gov](http://willcountyclerk.gov) to make election information, most notably election results, easier to access for voters, candidates, and Election Judges.

## Universal Ballot Applications

The County Clerk revamped Election Day Ballot Applications, which are signed by voters for signature verification, to eliminate all precinct-specific and election-specific information. This enabled the Clerk to print applications in bulk rather than tailor small batches for each precinct and election. This seemingly small change eliminates tremendous paper waste and will have saved a minimum \$160,000 over five elections through 2022 and will easily exceed \$500,000 for elections through 2026.

## Updated Election Judge Manual

The Election Judge Manual was restructured with a modern look and a new index, making it easier to use by Election Judges in the field.



## Enhanced Election Judge Training

The Clerk created a series of online training videos providing step-by-step instruction on important Election Day procedures.

## Updated Vote By Mail Procedures

The County Clerk brought all Vote By Mail procedures into compliance with the Illinois Election Code, including a provision requiring the separate mailing of Vote By Mail Ballot Applications and Vote By Mail Ballots.







Pollwatchers crowd around former Student Ambassador Kasey Lyn as she runs the election results tape during the April 2021 Consolidated Election. Kasey joined County Clerk Lauren Staley Ferry's staff in January 2021.

Photo Courtesy of Herald News/Shaw Media  
Photo Credit: Geoff Stelfox

### Student Ambassador Program

Will County Clerk Lauren Staley Ferry's Student Ambassador Program, enacted in 2019, has allowed more than 80 high school students to learn about and participate in the planning for our local elections.

County Clerk Staley Ferry was extraordinarily proud to welcome one of her Student Ambassadors, Kasey Lyn, as the newest full-time employee in her Voter Registration Department in early 2021. Kasey served in the inaugural Student Ambassador Program during the 2019-2020 school year. She responded to an offer for Student Ambassadors to assist with various aspects of the 2020 Presidential Election, including the processing of tens of thousands of Vote By Mail Applications. Kasey put in countless hours with the County Clerk's Office leading up to the November Presidential Election. During that time, she demonstrated a strong work ethic and a commitment to the election process. She also became thoroughly trained in Voter Registration and Vote By Mail procedures. The County Clerk's Office expects great things from Kasey, who continues to attend classes at Joliet Junior College.



For information about the Will County Clerk's Student Ambassador Program, contact [wcclerkambassadors@willcounty.gov](mailto:wcclerkambassadors@willcounty.gov).





## OVERVIEW: VOTING DURING A PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 Pandemic affected each of the past three elections in different fashions, with its initial expansion in the United States occurring immediately prior to the March 2020 Primary. The next three pages outline the major impacts of the pandemic on each of the three elections. This report will explore these impacts

in greater detail in the Vote By Mail, Early Voting, Election Day Voting, and Voter Registration sections. Major expenditures also will be explained in these sections. A summary of these major expenditures is on Page 20.





### March 17, 2020 Presidential Primary Election: A Rising Public Health Crisis

**Background** – The first reports of COVID-19 surfaced in late December 2019 / early January 2020 when the World Health Organization announced a mysterious and deadly flu-like outbreak in Wuhan, China. The WHO announced a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on Jan. 30, 2020, and the United States proclaimed a Public Health Emergency the following day. The WHO officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, and the United States declared a National Emergency on March 13, which was four days prior to the Primary.\* In Illinois, Gov. JB Pritzker issued a series of Executive Orders declaring Illinois a disaster area (March 9), limiting public gatherings (March 13), halting indoor dining (March 16), and closing Illinois schools (March 17, Election Day).\*\*



Will County Clerk Lauren Staley Ferry addresses the press regarding COVID-19 protocols prior to the March 2020 Primary Election.

**Impact** – The building sense of panic, various government declarations, and public closures had a dramatic effect on the Primary Election.

- Seven Polling Places across Will County cancelled in the days prior to the election, forcing the County Clerk's Office to seek last-minute relocations. Five of these Polling Places were located inside senior residential facilities.
- Election Judges, many of whom are senior citizens, began cancelling in record numbers, requiring our Election Judge coordinator to schedule every reserve judge and make emergency reassignments. All cancellations were filled.
- Supplies of hand sanitizer, gloves, and face masks to safeguard staff and Election Judges were depleted even though efforts to procure Personal Protective Equipment began more than six weeks prior to the election.
- Concerned voters flocked to Early Voting locations, prompting the Governor to urge clerks to expand Early Voting hours. The Will County Clerk's Office complied without reservation, increasing hours at its busiest locations to accommodate voters who feared crowded Polling Places on Election Day.

\* Dates compiled from the World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>), the US Department of Health and Human Services (<https://www.phe.gov/emergency/news/healthactions/phe/Pages/default.aspx>), and the Federal Register, (<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/18/2020-05794/declaring-a-national-emergency-concerning-the-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak>).

\*\* <https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/resources-for-executive-orders>

## OVERVIEW: VOTING DURING A PANDEMIC

### November 3, 2020 Presidential Election: A Widespread Pandemic

**Background** – Planning for the hotly contested Presidential Election began immediately after the Primary. Emergency legislation to expand voting access during the pandemic (SB1863) passed both houses on May 22, 2020 and was signed by the Governor on June 16, 2020. The legislation, which expired on Jan. 1, 2021, required County Clerks to send Vote By Mail Applications to virtually every registered voter, allowed for the use of Vote By Mail Collection Boxes, and made significant changes to how Vote By Mail Ballots were to be processed. When the legislation became law in June, the daily number of new COVID-19 cases was declining in Illinois and Will County. But cases began to rise steadily in July before spiking in October. By Election Day, new daily cases had reached 6,598 across Illinois and 434 in Will County.\*



Lauren Staley Ferry with PPE supplied to Election Judges during the General Election.

**Impact** – Planning for the 2020 Presidential Election was shaped by intense public interest, concerns over the pandemic, and implementation of the legislative changes.

- Participation in Vote By Mail skyrocketed to an unprecedented 123,776 requests. This was a 310% increase compared to the last presidential election.
- The Clerk's Office effectively doubled its staff with part-time Election Judges to assist in preparing and processing Vote By Mail Ballots.
- Eight Central Counts were required to tabulate Vote By Mail Ballots.
- The County Clerk adopted rigorous health safety protocols to protect full-time and part-time staff working in crowded conditions.
- The emergency legislation required a costly mailing of more than 463,000 Vote By Mail Applications to registered voters. This emergency mandate was in addition to an already scheduled mass mailing of more than 450,000 Voter Registration Cards required by existing statute.
- A shortage of County Office Building space required creative solutions for preparation and secure storage of Vote By Mail Ballot packets.
- The acquisition of Personal Protective Equipment, including the rental of 273 hand sanitation stands, involved extensive cost and coordination.
- A Vote By Mail Collection Box program required the creation of a detailed protocol and involved extensive costs and coordination.
- An emergency pay increase was approved to incentivize Election Judges and discourage cancellations.
- An extensive COVID-19 Election Day protocol was developed in conjunction with the Illinois Department of Public Health and put into effect on Election Day and during Early Voting.
- CARES Act grant funding enabled the County Clerk's Office to cover many costs associated with the 2020 Presidential Election.



\* New case data compiled from the New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/illinois-covid-cases.html>), and the Will County Health Department (<https://willcountyhealth.org/COVID-19/case-demographics-data/>).



## April 6, 2021 Consolidated Election: A Declining Pandemic

**Background** – Planning for the Consolidated Election began before the dust settled on the Presidential Election. Hope was on the horizon as increasing numbers of Illinois and Will County residents began receiving vaccinations and new cases dropped. The number of new daily cases in Will County had declined from 800 on Dec. 9, 2020 to 202 by Election Day on April 6, 2021. The total number of administered vaccine doses in Will County was nearing 300,000 as Election Day approached.\* The public also had become accustomed to social distancing, wearing face masks, and other protective measures. The County Clerk’s Office maintained all public health safety protocols it had established in 2020.

**Impact** – Below is an overview of the pandemic’s effects on the Consolidated Election.

- The number of Vote By Mail requests topped 18,000, nearly tripling the number of 2019 Consolidated Election requests in Will County. This occurred even though there was no state mandate to send an application to all voters.
- There was limited federal grant funding to cover Personal Protective Equipment, particularly the costly rental of hand-sanitation stands.
- Because election planning prevented the County Clerk from reducing staff levels, employees were deemed essential and began receiving vaccinations in February.
- The pandemic limited in-person outreach efforts to boost voter turnout.
- Segments of Election Judge training and testing were moved online to avoid large group gatherings.



Will County Clerk staffer Christine Randall gets her COVID-19 vaccination before the Consolidated Election.

\* Statistics compiled from the Illinois Department of Public Health (<http://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccinedata?county=Will>) and the Will County Health Department (<https://willcountyhealth.org/COVID-19/case-demographics-data/>)



## ADDRESSING 'A SEVERE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY'

### SENATE BILL 1863 / PUBLIC ACT 101-0642

The impact the emergency legislation (SB1863 / Public Act 101-0642) had on the November 3, 2020 Presidential Election cannot be understated. The General Assembly framed the purpose of the law in the context of “a severe public health emergency.” Lawmakers declared it necessary to modify the administration of the Presidential Election “to protect the safety, health, and rights of the people of Illinois.”

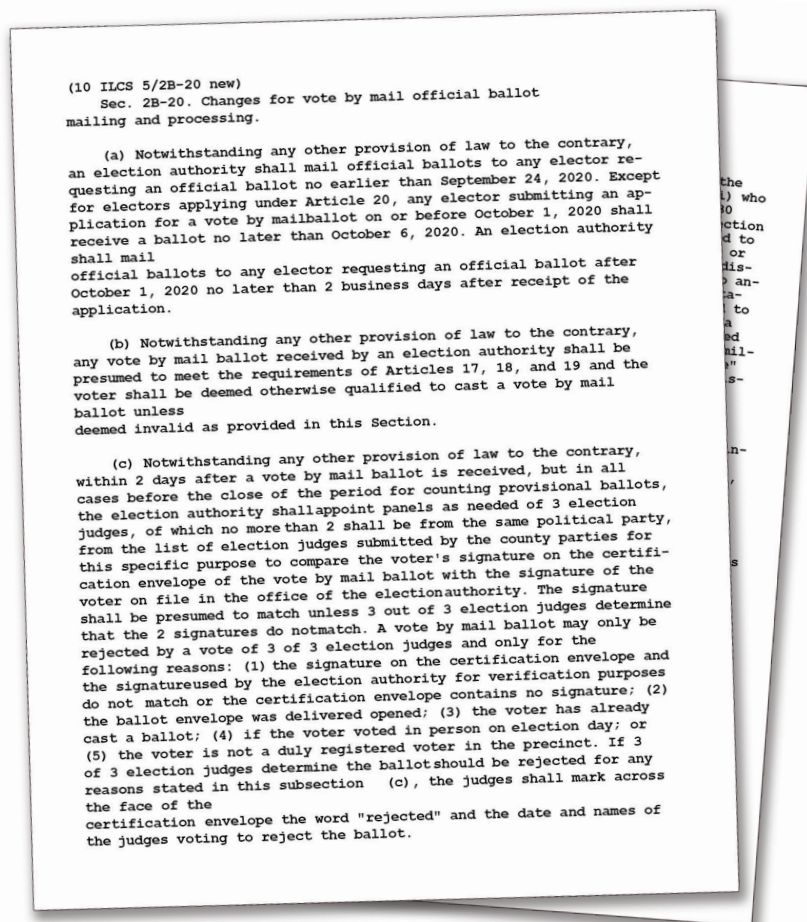
**Summary** – Below are key mandates contained in the emergency legislation:

- Required County Clerks to send a Vote By Mail Application to anyone who:
  - Voted in the prior three elections (2020 Primary Election, 2019 Consolidated Election, 2018 General Election).
  - Registered to vote or changed their address after the 2020 Primary Election.
  - Filed a secondary or mailing address with the County Clerk’s Office.
  - *Note: The application had to be sent to all addresses on file with the County Clerk’s Office.*
- Ordered the Illinois Secretary of State to send two reminders to citizens who had yet to complete their Vote By Mail Applications, a measure that created tremendous confusion for voters.
  - Many voters already had received multiple applications because of the secondary addresses on file with the County Clerk’s Office.
  - Candidates and campaigns were also sending applications to targeted voters independent of the County Clerk’s Office.



## ADDRESSING 'A SEVERE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY'

- Required County Clerks to hire Election Judges, who worked in panels of three, to approve voter signatures on returned Vote By Mail Ballots.
- Outlined specific procedures for the inspection of Vote By Mail Ballot Envelopes, including unanimous agreement by all three Election Judges that a voter's signature does not match before it can be rejected.
- Authorized the use of Vote By Mail Drop Boxes for the collection of ballots.
- Expanded Early Voting hours for Permanent Polling Places until 7 p.m. on weekdays and 5 p.m. on weekends and holidays during both weeks of Early Voting.
- Closed schools and government offices on Election Day to facilitate voting.
- Required the creation of a countywide Polling Place on Election Day.







# VOTE BY MAIL

	CONSOLIDATED ELECTION			PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY		PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION	
	2017	2019	2021	2016	2020	2016	2020
<b>BALLOTS REQUESTED</b>	9,558	6,381	18,178	8,692	12,407	30,192	123,779
		33% ↓	185% ↑		43% ↑		310% ↑
<b>BALLOTS RETURNED, VOTED</b>	5,408	4,860	14,665	5,946	10,630	22,566	109,993
		10% ↓	202% ↑		79% ↑		387% ↑

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the June 2020 emergency legislation propelled participation in Vote By Mail to unprecedented levels for the 2020 Presidential Election. This participation carried over to the 2021 Consolidated Election, which saw triple the requests for Vote By Mail Ballots compared to the 2019 Consolidated Election. Meeting the increased demand required planning and ingenuity.

The Will County Clerk's Office has historically printed and assembled Vote By Mail Ballot packets in-house. Before the pandemic struck, the County Clerk's Office had begun exploring options for high-speed automation of its Vote By Mail Program. However, a lack of available space, costs, and timing precluded the office from attempting to fast-track an automation initiative during the pandemic.

The greatest obstacles – cost and available space – acted in tandem. The Will County Office Building has no capacity to locate the sizeable and costly pieces of sophisticated equipment necessary for in-house automation. The cost of full-scale automation for assembly and processing could reach as high as \$1.5 million. But with absolutely no available space and time at a premium, the decision was made to focus on large-scale manual assembly and processing for the 2020 Presidential Election.

This section details the financial and logistical impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Public Act 101-0642 on the Will County Clerk's Vote By Mail Program for the past three elections. Most of the costs included in the Vote By Mail section of this report were funded through the CARES Act.





**Assembling / Processing Ballots** – The County Clerk’s Office deployed part-time Election Judges to assemble and process Vote By Mail Ballots. At certain times, 20-25 Election Judges joined full-time staff on site to assemble Vote By Mail packets, inspect Ballot Envelope signatures, process applications, and perform other election-related functions.

- The Clerk’s Office developed a rigorous health safety protocol, requiring Election Judges to join staff in following all CDC guidelines including wearing masks, social distancing, washing hands, and sanitizing surfaces.
- Election Judges and staff assembled Vote By Mail packets working in teams of two.
  - These teams prepared roughly 102,000 ballot packets for mailing between Sept. 8 and Sept. 24, which was the first day under the law to begin sending Vote By Mail Ballots.
  - The remaining 22,000 packets were assembled between Sept. 24 and Oct. 29, which was the last day to submit a Vote By Mail Application.
- Election Judges worked in teams of three (split by political party in a 2:1 ratio) to process returned Vote By Mail Ballots.
  - 111,859.....Returned
  - 109,993.....Approved and tabulated
  - 1,114 .....Rejected by Election Judges for non-matching/missing signatures or open Ballot Envelopes
  - 752.....Disqualified for other reasons (missing ballots, late postmark, undeliverable, etc.).
  - All reviews were conducted entirely in the presence of Pollwatchers.
- **Total Cost:** \$129,568.52 (CARES Act funding)

**Small-Scale Automation** – To speed Vote By Mail procedures, the Clerk’s Office made several purchases that allowed for small-scale automation. These included:

- Two tabletop Panasonic scanners that interfaced with our voter registration system. The program, developed by the Clerk’s Office and Panasonic, enabled Election Judges to more efficiently examine signatures on sealed Vote By Mail Ballot Envelopes in compliance with state legislation. The scanners were used in the 2020 Presidential Election and the 2021 Consolidated Election.
- A high-speed, high-volume Opex Omaton 306 letter opener was purchased through Pinnacle, a subsidiary of Pitney Bowes. The opener enabled staff to

quickly and efficiently open 109,993 sealed Ballot Envelopes in the presence of Pollwatchers prior to each of the eight Central Counts.

- Nine OKI C711 printers from our vendor, Election Systems & Software, and three Canon Image-RUNNER 525iF printers from Canon Solutions America, Inc. This doubled capacity to print ballots, ballot envelopes, and transmittal sheets from three to six stations at a maximum rate of 1,800 packets per hour.
- The following costs apply to automation:
  - Scanners.....\$85,159.40 (CARES Act funding)
  - Letter Opener.....\$16,742.83 (CARES Act funding)
  - Printers.....\$39,525.00 (Clerk’s Office funded)

**Secure Drop Boxes** – The Clerk’s Office purchased eight Vote By Mail Drop Boxes that were strategically located inside secure, monitored public facilities throughout Will County. The Clerk’s Office opened all eight Drop Boxes on Sept. 24, 2020, which was the first day to begin mailing Vote By Mail Ballots. The Drop Boxes were extremely popular with voters. More than one-third of our 109,993 tabulated Vote By Mail Ballots were returned via Drop Box.

- The Clerk’s Office purchased one 650-pound, steel, heavy-duty Drop Box suitable for outdoor collections from Vote Armor Ballot Collection Products. It was located outside the Will County Clerk’s Office under camera surveillance and bolted into the concrete, available for 24-hour service.



## VOTE BY MAIL

- Seven smaller Drop Boxes suitable for indoor use were purchased from U.S. Mail Supply Inc. which supplies boxes to the United States Postal Service. These boxes were located inside local libraries and Governors State University, all under camera surveillance. They were available for service during each facility's hours of operation.



- The Drop Boxes and related services were funded through the CARES Act at the following costs:
  - o Vote Armor Box ..... \$3,895.00
  - o U.S. Mail Supply Boxes..... \$6,864.00
  - o Digital Graphics..... \$1,080.00

These grant purchases were made with the intent of using all of the Drop Boxes in future elections. The General Assembly did not authorize their use in time for the 2021 Consolidated Election, but they will be deployed in 2022.

**Drop Box Collections** – The Clerk's Office developed a detailed security protocol and deployed Election Judges from both political parties traveling in teams of three (split by political party in a 2:1 ratio) to collect Vote By Mail Ballot Envelopes from the Drop Boxes daily. The collection protocol involved daily record keeping and multiple security checks to ensure the safe retrieval of ballots. Below are several highlights regarding the Drop Box Collections Program.

- 18 Election Judges trained as drivers.
- Daily collections involved two teams of three in the field.
- Masks required while driving.
- **Total Cost:** \$17,655.61 (CARES Act funding)

### Drop Box Locations / Totals

<i>Will County Clerk's Office</i>	
<i>Drop Box/Counter</i>	<b>11,069</b>
<i>Frankfort Library</i>	
<i>Frankfort</i>	<b>6,386</b>
<i>Governors State University</i>	
<i>University Park</i>	<b>1,198</b>
<i>Fountaindale Library</i>	
<i>Bolingbrook</i>	<b>4,706</b>
<i>Plainfield Library</i>	
<i>Plainfield</i>	<b>5,540</b>
<i>Naperville 95th St. Library</i>	
<i>Naperville</i>	<b>7,235</b>
<i>Wilmington Library</i>	
<i>Wilmington</i>	<b>540</b>
<i>White Oak Library</i>	
<i>Lockport</i>	<b>3,281</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,955</b>

*The County Clerk thanks all of our Drop Box hosts. Their enthusiastic partnership and watchful eyes added an extra layer of security to our collection program.*

**Saving Postage on Applications** – To save on postage and avoid two costly mailings, the County Clerk combined the mandatory mailing of Vote By Mail Applications required under the emergency legislation with the mandatory mailing of Voter Registration Cards already scheduled for 2020. The savings were significant.

- Estimated Postage for Two Mailings.....\$310,342.22
- Postage for Combined Mailing.....\$178,763.42
- **Combined Mail Savings.....\$131,578.80**

Postage is funded through the Will County Executive's Office. The Executive's Office was reimbursed for postage associated with the 2020 Presidential Election through CARES Act funding allocated specifically for mailing costs. Total Reimbursement: \$297,237.54.



**Increased Central Counts** – The Will County Clerk’s Office conducted eight Central Counts in the 2020 Presidential Election to process the extraordinarily large quantity of Vote By Mail Ballots through tabulators. Central Counts require the hiring of sworn Election Judges from both political parties to extract ballots from Vote By Mail Envelopes and feed them into tabulators. The County Clerk’s Office has historically conducted one or two Central Counts prior to Election Day. Vote By Mail Ballots received after Election Day are tabulated at a Provisional Count conducted two weeks after the Election. Below are several highlights regarding the eight Central Counts conducted during the 2020 Presidential Election.



- 40-50 sworn Election Judges from both parties were deployed per Central Count.
- Minimum 15 County Clerk staff members worked each Central Count.
- Seven Central Counts were held before Election Day to open and process 95,720 ballots.
- One Central Count was held after Election Day to process 14,050 ballots.
- Results from Central Counts remain unread and sealed until after polls close on Election Night.
- Total Cost for Election Judges: \$24,637.03
- Total Staff Hours: 600 (15 staff x 5 hours x 8 Central Counts)

**Resolving a Space Crunch** – Tight quarters at the Will County Office Building required creativity to generate cost-effective space for the safe storage of more than 100,000 Vote By Mail packets.

- The County Clerk’s Office rented two storage pods that were located behind the WCOB. The pods were filled with general supplies and non-sensitive materials (rolling storage racks, signs, etc.).



- The storage pods opened more than 300 square feet of indoor, camera-monitored, locked, and secure space for ballot storage.
- **Cost:** Glen Ellyn Storage Corp. (\$800 CARES Act funding)

**Public Education** – The Clerk produced a series of informative online videos educating the public about the Vote By Mail process. The videos also covered Early Voting options and public health safety protocols for Election Day and Early Voting.

- Visit our YouTube page to view all videos at: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPayzBxh-g8eVKz\\_JlstOgQ/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPayzBxh-g8eVKz_JlstOgQ/featured)
- **Cost:** Unidos Marketing - **\$25,500** (CARES Act funding)





# EARLY VOTING

	<b>CONSOLIDATED ELECTION</b>			<b>PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY</b>		<b>PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION</b>	
	2017	2019	2021	2016	2020	2016	2020
<b>TOTAL</b>	8,819	8,266 6% ↓	13,606 65% ↑	13,891	25,787 86% ↑	63,236	111,552 76% ↑

The County Clerk already had followed through on her commitment to expand Early Voting across Will County with the addition of three new locations before COVID-19 surfaced in early 2020. These new locations proved to be important additions throughout 2020. Noting public concern and the possibility that voters – particularly vulnerable senior citizens – would be reluctant to cast ballots in crowded Polling Places during the Primary, Gov. Pritzker urged County Clerks to expand Early Voting hours on the weekend prior to Election Day. The Clerk’s Office made these emergency accommodations without reservation. This section details the financial and logistical impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Will County Clerk’s Early Voting Program for the past three elections. It also outlines some of the changes and initiatives involving Early Voting in Will County.

**Emergency Expansion Of Primary Hours –** As the emerging pandemic created alarm, leading up to the March 2020 Primary, the County Clerk’s Office implemented an emergency expansion of Early Voting hours for the weekend prior to Election Day at the following locations:

- The Will County Clerk’s Office, until 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. A total of 4 extra evening hours for the weekend.
- Governors State University, until 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. A total of 15 hours, including the addition of evening hours and an unscheduled weekend day.
- City of Naperville, until 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. A total of 5 hours including unscheduled evenings.
- Village of New Lenox, Saturday and Sunday days. A total of 8 hours over two previously unscheduled days.
- Lockport Township, Saturday and Sunday days. A total increase of 8 hours including the addition of an unscheduled weekend day.
- **TOTAL: 40 hours of expanded weekend Early Voting.**



**New Early Voting Locations** - The County Clerk expanded Early Voting by bringing the following new locations on board for the 2020 Election Cycle: Shorewood Village Hall, Shorewood; Spanish Community Center, Joliet; Prairie Activity & Recreation Center, Plainfield; and Louis Sherman Community Center, Steger. Because of internal occupancy restrictions during the pandemic, Shorewood Village Hall and Prairie Activity & Recreation Center declined to serve as Early Voting locations during the 2020 Presidential Election.

**Wheatland Township Early Voting** – Wheatland Township in Naperville informed the Clerk’s Office its facility could no longer serve as an Early Voting location in 2020 due to a lack of suitable parking and building space.

- After a long search, the Clerk’s Office reached an agreement with the privately run Tallgrass Clubhouse in Naperville to replace Wheatland Township for the 2020 Primary Election. However, Tallgrass declined to participate in the November Presidential Election due to the pandemic.
- The Clerk’s Office was pleased to reach an agreement with the 95th Street Library in Naperville to provide Early Voting services in the November 2020 Presidential Election and the April 2021 Consolidated Election.



**Early Voting Enhancements** – The Clerk’s Office implemented the following improvements during the 2020 Presidential Election to address increased activity related to the pandemic:

- Election Judges were hired to serve voters at the busiest Early Voting locations.
  - o Locations included the Will County Clerk’s Office in Joliet, the 95th Street Library in Naperville, the Joliet Park District in Joliet, and Fountaindale Library in Bolingbrook.
  - o Election Judges checked in voters, assisted senior citizens or those with disabilities, organized long lines, and addressed electioneering issues.
  - o The Will County Clerk’s Office deployed Election Judges to serve voters in the WCOB lobby, supplemented by County Clerk’s Office employees at the front counter.
- All Early Voting election workers who directly served the public were paid at a premium rate of \$20 per hour during the Presidential Election. **Premium Cost:** \$115,339.60 (CARES Act Funding)
- The Clerk’s Office developed a detailed COVID-19 Safety Protocol based upon recommendations from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Will County Health Department to protect election workers and the public during Early Voting.
- Work stations were added at the Will County Clerk’s Office, Lockport Township, and Homer Township to speed the process and reduce lines. The County Clerk’s Office utilized computers, printers, and tabulators previously used at Shorewood Village Hall and Prairie Activity & Recreation Center.



# ELECTION DAY VOTING

	CONSOLIDATED ELECTION			PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY		PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION	
	2017	2019	2021	2016	2020	2016	2020
TOTAL	60,812	44,707	49,415	153,374	78,686	210,998	125,100
		26% ↓	11% ↑		49% ↓		41% ↓

Public concern turned to panic as COVID-19 cases began to surface in Illinois and Will County in the days leading up to the March 2020 Primary. Polling Places cancelled at the very last minute. Election Judges, many who are senior citizens, also cancelled in record numbers. Procuring Personal Protective Equipment for Election Judges and the voting public proved difficult in the March Primary. However, procurement issues were resolved over the summer, and the Will County Clerk's Office entered the November Presidential Election with sufficient supplies and a detailed health safety protocol for Polling Places and Early Voting.

**Primary Election Polling Place Cancellations –** Seven Polling Places cancelled in the week leading up to the March 2020 Primary, with one withdrawing the day before the election. Five of the Polling Places were located inside apartment-style retirement communities that house vulnerable populations. The cancellations impacted 7,629 registered voters in Crete, Jackson, Joliet, Lockport, New

Lenox, and Troy townships. The County Clerk's Office:

- Sent a letter of notification to registered voters in the affected precincts as required by statute (10 ILCS 5/11-2) with the exception of the Polling Place that cancelled the day prior to the Primary Election.
- Placed street signs and window signs at the original Polling Places directing voters to new locations.
- Issued press releases and placed notifications on social media.

The County Clerk extends her sincere thanks to Crest Hill Mayor Ray Soliman, Crete Fire Protection District Chief Jeff Panega, Elwood Village Clerk Julie Friebele, Joliet Park District Executive Director Brad Staab, Troy Community School District Superintendent Todd Koehl, and Peace Lutheran Church Pastor Dave Hedlin for their generous assistance in making last-minute Polling Place relocations.



**Polling Place Premium** – For the November 2020 Presidential Election, the County Clerk’s Office provided Polling Places an additional \$100 per precinct above the standard \$75 fee to cover cleaning costs after Election Day.

**Total Polling Place Premium:** \$30,200 (Cares Act funding)

**COVID-19 Protocol** – The County Clerk’s Office developed a detailed COVID-19 Safety Protocol based upon recommendations from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Will County Health Department to protect Election Judges, Field Technicians, and the public during Election Day Voting. The same protocol applied to Early Voting.

- The protocol was enacted for both the November 2020 Presidential Election and the April 2021 Consolidated Election.
- Procedures involved safely setting up Polling Places, using protective gear, sanitizing surfaces, and wiping pens.
- The plan also involved procedures for serving voters who refuse to wear masks (*referred to by IDPH as non-compliant voters*).
- The protocol can be viewed online at the following Will County Clerk link: <https://assets01.aws.connect.clarityelections.com/Assets/Connect/RootPublish/will-il.connect.clarityelections.com/Elections/2020GeneralElection/COVIDINFO.pdf>
- The Illinois State Board of Elections De-Escalation Guide also was emphasized and can be viewed at the following Will County Clerk link: <https://assets01.aws.connect.clarityelections.com/Assets/Connect/RootPublish/will-il.connect.clarityelections.com/Elections/2020GeneralElection/DE-EscalationGuide2020.pdf>
- Safety equipment involved renting 273 large hand sanitation stands and acquiring protective masks, face shields, disposable gloves, sanitizing wipes, and individually sized hand sanitizer containers.
- Major Costs Presidential Election Only (CARES Act Funding):
  - o Sanitation Stations (Rental/Transport).....\$23,800.00
  - o Face shields.....\$ 4,368.50
  - o Other (wipes, masks, gloves, etc.).....\$15,147.94

## **Non-Compliant Voters (Voters Who Refuse to Wear Protective Masks):**

“Election Authorities are prohibited from preventing a non-compliant voter from casting a ballot for refusal to wear a face covering outside or inside a polling place.” -IDPH

- Politely inform non-compliant voters you will:
  - o Mark and hold their place in the line.
  - o Ask them to step out of the line away from other voters.
  - o Call them to the station to vote when it is their turn.
- **DO NOT** engage in discussions or arguments about wearing masks or social distancing.

### **IF THERE IS A DISTURBANCE;**

### **IF ELECTION JUDGES OR OTHER VOTERS ARE THREATENED**

Call the Election Judge Hotline at (815) 727-6006 for non-emergency situations.

Dial 911 in an emergency or if you are threatened.





## ELECTION DAY VOTING



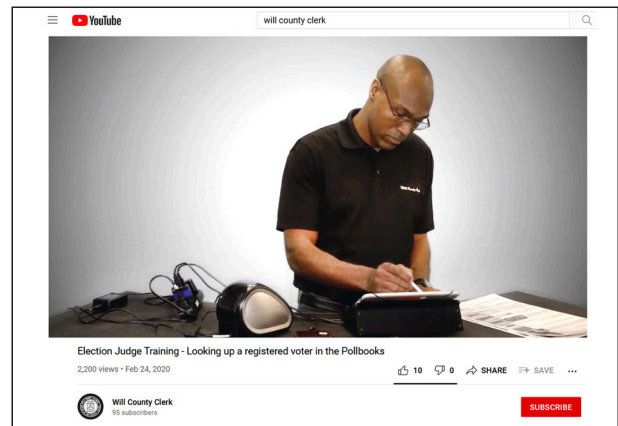
**Election Judges** – The Will County Clerk’s Election Judge Team estimates that more than 800 Election Judges cancelled in the last few days before the March 2020 Primary as COVID-19 began to rise. The County Clerk’s Office assigned all trained reserve judges who were willing to serve. On the day before the Primary, the Clerk’s Office issued a public call for additional backup Election Judges from both political parties to fill potential vacancies. All Polling Places were fully staffed during the Primary, including a small contingent of last-minute backup judges who took oaths on Election Day and received on-the-job training alongside experienced Judges. The County Clerk’s Office also enacted a number of initiatives to improve training during the pandemic and to incentivize Election Judges.

- Granted Election Judges an additional \$100 in pay (\$150 to \$250) to serve voters in the 2020 Presidential Election. The \$100 premium also applied to the 76 Field Technicians who support Election Judges on Election Day.
  - o **Premium Costs:**

Election Judges.....	\$ 189,700.00
Field Techs.....	\$ 7,600.00
  - o **Total Costs:**

Election Judges.....	\$ 516,220.10
Field Techs.....	\$ 31,654.53
  - o County Clerk Staley Ferry said publicly:  
*“The pay increases show our deep appreciation for the valuable service our Election Judges and Early Voting workers provide to voters during what is certain to be an unprecedented Presidential Election. We understand that assisting the public during a pandemic creates significant health safety concerns. In addition to providing extra compensation, we want them to know we’re doing everything we can to keep them safe when they are assisting voters.”*

- Reduced the number of Election Judge trainees per session to 10.
- Advanced an initiative begun prior to the pandemic to create online training videos.
  - o Seven videos plus the entire Election Judge Manual are online at <https://www.willcounty-clerk.gov/elections/current-election-judges/>
  - o **Cost:** \$9,500 (Clerk’s Office Funded)



**Post Election Day Work** – After the 2020 Presidential Election, the County Clerk’s Office hired seven Election Judges from both political parties to assist with an 18-precinct discovery recount in response to a petition filed by congressional candidate Jim Oberweis. No discrepancies were found. Similar petitions were filed by Oberweis in six other counties pursuant to 10 ILCS 5/22-9.1. Three of the seven Election Judges assisted County Clerk’s Office staff in preparing election materials for inspection during the discovery. These three judges also entered data related to tens of thousands of returned Voter Registration Cards sent in the summer’s mass mailing. **Total Cost:** \$26,211.25.





# VOTER REGISTRATION

	<b>CONSOLIDATED ELECTION 2019</b>	<b>PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY 2020</b>	<b>PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2020</b>	<b>CONSOLIDATED ELECTION 2021</b>
<i>Total Registered Voters</i>	<b>439,720</b>	<b>453,582</b>	<b>463,465</b>	<b>464,661</b>
<i>Voter Turnout</i>	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>25.41%</b>	<b>75.10%</b>	<b>16.74%</b>

The number of registered voters continued to rise in 2020 and 2021 as it has done between every election for at least a decade.

The numbers in the chart are snapshots of voter registrations taken just before each election. Registration lists are updated daily as new voters are added and statuses are changed to inactive due to out-of-county relocations, deaths, voter inactivity, etc.

In the summer of 2020, the Clerk's Office mailed 453,720 Voter Registration Cards as required by statute (10 ILCS 5/6-59). As documented in the Vote By Mail section of this report, the County Clerk saved \$131,578.80 in postage by combining the mandatory mailing of these cards with the mandatory mailing of 463,062 Vote By Mail Applications required under the 2020 emergency legislation.





# SUMMARY: MAJOR EXPENSES

The Will County Clerk's Office received three major grants to cover costs associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic. Below is a summary of major purchases under each grant.

## Vote By Mail

- Election Judges / VBM Assembly, Signature Verification: .....\$ 129,568.52 (CARES Act)
- Scanners .....\$ 85,159.40 (CARES Act)
- Letter Opener .....\$ 16,742.83 (CARES Act)
- Printers .....\$ 39,525.00 (Clerk's Budget)
- Drop Box Purchase ..... (CARES Act)
  - Vote Armor Box.....\$ 3,895.00
  - U.S. Mail Supply Boxes .....\$ 6,864.00
  - Digital Graphics .....\$ 1,080.00
- Drop Box Drivers .....\$ 17,655.61 (CARES Act)
- Combined Mailing.....\$ 241,800.00 (CARES Act)
  - \$ 134,850.00 (Postage Savings)
- Central Counts, Election Judges.....\$ 25,637.03 (CARES Act)
- Central Counts, Staff .....600 hours
- Glen Ellyn Storage Corp.....\$ 800.00 (CARES Act)
- Unidos Marketing.....\$ 25,500.00 (CARES Act)

## Early Voting

- Early Voting Clerks Premium .....\$ 115,339.60 (CARES Act)
- Letter Opener .....\$ 16,742.83 (CARES Act)

## Election Day Voting

- Sanitation Stations (Rental/Transport) .....\$ 23,800.00 (CARES Act)
- Face Shields.....\$ 4,368.50 (CARES Act)
- Other (wipes, masks, gloves, etc.) .....\$ 15,147.94 (CARES Act)
- Polling Place Premium .....\$ 30,200.00 (CARES Act)
- Premium - Election Judges .....\$ 189,700.00 (CARES Act)
- Premium – Field Technicians.....\$ 7,600.00 (CARES Act)
- Election Judges – Post Election .....\$ 26,211.15 (CARES Act)
- Election Judge Training Videos .....\$ 9,500.00 (Clerk's Budget)







## FUTURE CHALLENGES

The Will County Clerk's Office faces several challenges as it looks toward future elections.

### **Vote By Mail Automation**

Public interest in this voting option was on the rise before the COVID-19 Pandemic. The public health crisis and the General Assembly's legislative response propelled Vote By Mail participation to unprecedented levels in the 2020 Presidential Election. The appeal of Vote By Mail carried over to the 2021 Consolidated Election, which saw requests double and triple compared to prior Consolidated Elections.

The Vote By Mail Program will continue to grow as more people become familiar with this option. In May 2021, the General Assembly passed another comprehensive election package that allows all qualified voters to apply for permanent Vote By Mail status. Those who apply for this status will automatically receive a Vote By Mail Ballot prior to each election until they opt out of the program. Furthermore, the law requires County Clerks to notify all qualified voters of the option for permanent Vote By Mail status prior to the 2022 General Election.

Will County Clerk Lauren Staley Ferry is pleased to work in partnership with the Will County Board to secure \$1.9 million in funding to fully automate her Vote By Mail Program. The funding pays for the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment for printing, assembling, and processing Vote By Mail packets as well as workspace renovations to house the new machinery. Automation will enable staff to print, package, and process ballots in a fraction of the time it took during the 2020 Presidential Election.





## FUTURE CHALLENGES

It will also allow for meticulous in-house quality control of the assembly and tracking of Vote By Mail packets as they travel to and from the Clerk's Office via the United States Postal Service. And the necessary redesign of Vote By Mail Envelopes will enable the Clerk's Office to presort outgoing packets, cutting postage costs potentially in half. As this report is being printed, County Clerk Staley Ferry is in the process of formalizing an agreement with BlueCrest, a global leader in enterprise print, mail, and customer communications for the purchase of this equipment. Formerly a division of Pitney Bowes' Document Messaging Technologies, BlueCrest provides a comprehensive line of printers, inserters, and sorters for an integrated, secure, start-to-finish Vote By Mail program.

Equipment includes: the EvoluJet Ballot Printer, which has the capacity to print up to 2,200 Vote By Mail Ballots per hour; the ReliaVote Mailstream Evolution Inserter, which can assemble for mailing up to 7,000 Vote By Mail packets per hour; and the ReliaVote Vantage Sorter, which can sort up to 24,000 packets per hour for both presort mailing and ballot returns.

**County Clerk Staley Ferry estimates this automation will save taxpayers a minimum of \$500,000 per election based on the fulfillment of 125,000 Vote By Mail Ballot requests. This investment will pay for itself by the end of 2024.**

### Available Work Space

For the past two years, the County Clerk has been exploring options to expand work space inside the Will County Office Building to store, service, and stage voting equipment. A Vote By Mail automation program increases the need for work space. The Clerk's Office continues working with the County Executive's team to address these space concerns.

### Modernizing Election Equipment

Voting equipment and software programs utilized in Will County are in need of updating. The County Clerk's team has begun exploring options to modernize equipment and systems.

## SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

The Will County Clerk's Office addressed every challenge presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The changing nature of the pandemic, state public health guidelines, and mandates contained in the 2020 emergency legislation required prompt and decisive action to ensure the past three elections were coordinated safely and in compliance with the law. Despite these challenges, voting options were expanded in every category to ensure that no one would be denied access to the ballot because of the public health crisis. Will County Clerk Lauren Staley Ferry remains committed to conducting secure, accurate, and transparent elections on behalf of all Will County voters.



**Published by: Lauren Staley Ferry, Will County Clerk**

2020/2021 Elections Report

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