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May 12, 2020

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Hon. Ron DeSantis

Governor of Florida

The Capitol

404 S. Monroe Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Dear Governor DeSantis,

On March 27, 2020, President Donald J. Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) into law. The Act includes \$400 million in new Help America Vote Act (HAVA) emergency funds, made available to states to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus for the 2020 federal election cycle. This supplemental appropriation funding, distributed by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), will provide states with additional resources to protect the 2020 elections from the effects of the novel coronavirus. Out of the \$400 million, the state of Florida is eligible for \$20,253,853.

Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, states must make a 20% match available within two years of receiving the funds. In order for the state of Florida to receive the \$20 million dollars, it must provide a match of \$4,050,771. Upon reaching out to Kinza Ghaznavi, who leads the Grants Division at the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the League received this response:

"Florida has notified us of its intent to request the funds, but is not able to formalize its request. They are currently outside their regularly scheduled legislative session to approve their budget plan, request the draw, and secure the 20% match commitment. Once they do that, they plan on formally submitting their disbursement request."

While the current legislature has already rejected calls for a special session to address issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES HAVA funding does not require states to fulfill their required match until March 27, 2022. Two regularly scheduled legislative sessions will occur before the state match is required. A plan could be submitted to the EAC where an outline is made to show that the necessary funding for the match will come from one of the two or from both regularly scheduled legislative sessions.

Another important factor regarding the situation is that the incoming Senate President, Wilton Simpson, has emphasized that Florida has a deep \$4 billion in reserve that can help it weather the financial problems caused by the virus shutdown. As previously mentioned, the required match for the CARE HAVA funds is only \$4 million, a very small fraction of the billions in reserve. The match could be easily taken care of from this money.

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So, these facts lead the League to wonder why hasn't a formal request for the funds been submitted to the EAC? It seems to be clear that a plan to match the money in future legislative sessions or a plan that utilizes the reserves could be submitted to ensure the money, which is intended to help Floridians vote, is secured.

The League joins the bipartisan calls for action on this matter. We urge the state to formally request the funding immediately and subsequently provide subgrants to all 67 Supervisors of Elections as they have requested. Such action will undoubtedly help prepare each county for efficient and safe elections.

Sincerely,



Patricia Brigham
President, League of Women Voters of Florida

CC:

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