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U.S. Postal Service says it can't guarantee all N.J. mail-in ballots will be delivered on time

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The U.S. Postal Service has told New Jersey it can't guarantee all mail-in ballots will be delivered in time to be counted in November, according to a letter obtained Friday by NJ Advance Media.

The state received the warning as it prepares to dramatically ramp up mail-in voting amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Gov. Phil Murphy said Friday that all 6.2 million registered voters in the Garden State will receive a ballot in the mail ahead of November's elections, which include the presidential race. There will also be a select number of in-person polling locations across the state where voters can vote by paper provisional ballot.

A Murphy spokeswoman declined comment on the letter, which was first reported by The Washington Post. The news organization said most states received the same warning.

The letter was sent to New Jersey's secretary of state July 30 by Thomas Marshall, the agency's general counsel and executive vice president.

Marshall wrote, "under our reading of New Jersey's election laws, certain deadlines for requesting and casting mail-in ballots are incongruous with the Postal Service's delivery standards."

That creates a "significant risk" a ballot could be requested and returned too late to be counted, he said.

Marshall asked state officials to use First Class mail to send blank ballots to voters, and to expect delivery to take at least a week. He also asked voters to mail their completed ballots at least one week ahead of deadline.

Some of Marshall's concerns, however, dealt with residents requesting to vote absentee, which will no longer be necessary since everyone will automatically receive a ballot in the mail.

The state does give a week for ballots postmarked on Election Day to be received by election boards. All ballots sent through the postal service, postmarked by Nov. 3, must be received by 8 p.m. on Nov. 10.

New Jersey Secretary of State spokeswoman Alicia D'Alessandro declined comment on the letter, and a spokesman for the postal service did not immediately provide comment.

Even before the letter was made public, state Republicans railed against Murphy's expansion of mail-in voting.

The move was "characteristically weak and ineffective," state GOP chairman Doug Steinhardt said in a statement. If casinos were open for business, he said, polling places should be open for voting.

State Sen. Joe Pennachio, R-Morris, called the move "political."

President Donald Trump has also railed against vote-by-mail efforts, claiming without evidence that it fosters fraud.

At his coronavirus briefing Friday, Murphy said "it's ridiculous the post office is being politicized."

But, he added: "I believe with all my heart it will be funded and cooler heads will prevail."