The integrity of Anchorage's elections are important, and the Anchorage Municipal Code provides the procedures and rules to protect them. This provides the voters, candidates, campaigns, media, and the public clear expectations of how elections will be conducted. The reality is, sometimes unforeseen circumstances and public emergencies disrupt or frustrate the Municipal Clerk's administration of an election and changes are necessary to protect the voter franchise, security and privacy of the ballots, and integrity of the election.

That is the reason the Emergency Plan was adopted in the Elections Code, Title 28 of the Anchorage Municipal Code, by AO 2013-130(S-1). The current spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) and public health advisories on how to protect oneself and the public have prompted the Municipal Clerk to review the Emergency Plan provisions to evaluate whether the tools necessary to address effects of Covid-19 on voters and election workers are sufficient. Although there are no confirmed cases of any person being infected with Covid-19 at the time of introduction of this ordinance, we should be prepared for the April 7, 2020 election with the appropriate tools in the Emergency Plan.

Persons who suspect they may have contracted Covid-19 or whom are in a high-risk vulnerable class are advised to self-quarantine or avoid places people congregate or pass through. Persons over age 60 are considered vulnerable to the virus, and all but a few of the current election officials are in this category. Many may understandably refuse to work at accessible vote centers or the Election Center if Covid-19 spreads to Anchorage during our election to protect their health and lives. A possible scenario is the election may be so short of staff that ballot security may be compromised and locations must close as a result. Even so, the Municipal Clerk’s Office wants to make sure all voters have the option to vote. The proposed ordinance explicitly gives the Municipal Clerk the authority to close the accessible vote centers, if necessary, provide for alternative means to receive and cast ballots, and ultimately protect the integrity of the election.

There are no anticipated economic effects from adding this authority to the Emergency Plan although there may be if exercised, so a summary of economic
effects is not submitted.

We request your support for the ordinance.

Prepared by: Municipal Clerk and Assembly Counsel
Respectfully submitted: Forrest Dunbar, Assembly Chair
District 5, East Anchorage

John Weddleton, Assembly Vice-Chair
District 6, South Anchorage, Turnagain Arm, and Girdwood