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CONTACT:
Vikki Ortiz, Illinois Communications Director
312-458-3609 or cell: 312-956-4117
vortiz@aarp.org

Ryan Gruenenfelder, Director of Advocacy and Outreach
217-747-8885 or cell: 217-899-7936
RGruenenfelder@aarp.org

AARP IL Urges Support for Mail-In Ballots to Protect Older Adults During COVID-19 Pandemic

Springfield, Ill. — On behalf of its 1.7 million older adults in Illinois who are highest risk for severe disease and death from COVID-19 related illness, AARP is urging Gov. Pritzker and Illinois lawmakers to do whatever it takes to expand the opportunity to allow Illinoians to vote by mail.

As lawmakers convene for three days this week, AARP believes passing SB 1863 SA #5 – while also keeping the existing methods of voting in place, including the 40 day early voting period and election day voting at current polling places – will balance the needs of democracy with the safety and health of the dedicated constituents who cast their votes in our state.

“Older Illinoians should not have to risk their lives or their health to exercise their right to vote,” said Bob Gallo, State Director of AARP Illinois. “With voters set to go to the polls on November 3, we believe that Illinois should take action now to ensure that all registered voters can cast their ballots safely.

SB 1863 SA #5 would protect older adults as they exercise their voting rights by:

- Easing the process for voters to vote by mail if they so choose;
- Automatically mailing or emailing an application to any voter who applied for a vote by mail ballot during primary or general elections held over the last 3 years (2018-2020);
- Requiring election authorities to reach out to educate Illinoians on how to vote by mail and why it is important;
• Keeping all existing methods of voting in place, including the 40 day early voting period and election day voting at all current polling places.

For nearly 40 years, the turnout of voters over the age of 45 has significantly outpaced that of younger Americans. For example, according to U.S. Census Bureau data for the 2016 presidential election, 71 percent of Americans over the age of 65 voted. That is compared with just 46 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds. Moreover, people over the age of 65 show up to the polls far more than any other age group.

However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that people over 65 years of age, and those with serious health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease, are at highest risk for severe disease and even death from COVID-19 related illness.

“These are challenging times for all Illinois residents,” Gallo said. “Older adults in this state must be able to rely on their elected officials for leadership to ensure that the largest voting bloc in our population, the 50+ voter, can continue to have a safe and secure way to exercise their right to vote during this unprecedented time.”

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About AARP

AARP is the nation’s largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence and nearly 38 million members, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.