

Arkansans with concerns over the coronavirus are now able to request an absentee ballot for the November election, no questions asked due to a reinterpretation of the current requirements from the Arkansas Secretary of State.

This change come as Arkansas experiences its highest ever recorded number of new COVID-19 cases, bringing the state's total over 22,000.

According to numbers from the Arkansas Department of Health, the state saw 878 new cases of the coronavirus. The total number in the state is now 22,075. Of that total, 6,098 are considered active.

Amid questions concerning what the November election would look like in Arkansas, Secretary of State John Thurston made an announcement that expanded who qualified for absentee voting last week

Thurston, speaking Thursday during Gov. Asa Hutchinson's daily briefing on the pandemic, said in addition to allowing anyone who wants an absentee ballot to apply for one, the state has already spent some funding from the federal CARES act on materials like personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer and new disposable stylus pens for those who want to go to the polls in-person.

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"...about that"

"So you can sign your name on the signature pad, go to the machine and vote, cast your vote and then throw the pen away. So when you come to the polling sites, technically you should not have to touch a single thing, other than that stylus pen. So we're very excited about that," Thurston said.

Chairmen of both the state Democratic and Republican parties Michael John Gray and Doyle Webb also attended the briefing and voiced their support for the expansion of absentee voting. Hutchinson said he was also in full agreement with Thurston's decision.

Applications for the absentee ballot must be received by Oct. 27 and the absentee ballots themselves must be submitted by 7:30 p.m. on election day.