



March 16, 2020

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Dear Members of Congress, Governors, and State Election Officials:

The co-chairs of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' Voting Rights Task Force write to urge Congress and *all* state elections officials to adopt and fund a number of key policies to ensure both the public's safety and the orderly conduct of the 2020 primary and general elections in light of the current threat posed by COVID-19.

We recognize the gravity of the circumstances, and fully appreciate the work federal, state, and local officials have undertaken in the past few weeks to protect the public from this pandemic. Lives are at stake, and as government officials respond with decisive action, they must also preserve our democratic systems. We propose a number of steps elections officials must take so that remaining primaries, and the general election on November 3, 2020, occur without causing undue risk to public health or disenfranchising any eligible voter. Officials must take into consideration accessibility for voters who have historically faced barriers to the ballot including Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American voters; voters with disabilities; and students. The following recommendations, which are detailed more fully by the [Brennan Center for Justice](#), must be adopted – and adopted quickly – to ensure that voting in America in 2020 remains fair, accessible, and safe.

### **Voter Registration:**

- Online voter registration (OVR) should be available in all states. OVR systems must be assessed and bolstered now to ensure they can accommodate a surge; all states that don't yet have the system in place should work now to set up online voter registration. This will be the safest method by which citizens register to vote.
- Allow same-day voter registration for all voters in this election.
- States must also extend voter registration deadlines in light of likely curtailment of government services and other potential online breakdowns.

### **Early In-Person Voting:**

- States should expand early voting options and allow at least two weeks of early in-person voting to reduce long lines and administrative stress on Election Day. Once doing so, elections administrators must educate the public about these options and urge them to come in early; such announcements benefit all.
- Early voting sites should follow the same procedures outlined for polling places which we have detailed below.

### **Voting by Mail:**

- Mail-in ballot options should be made available to *all registered voters* (not just those on absentee voter lists). All voters should have ballots mailed to them and be provided with a list of options as to how to cast their completed ballots (including pre-paid postage for mail return).
- Given that mail-in voting may be the only option for people who need assistance, or who are immune-compromised, to cast a ballot, states must allow voters who cannot vote in person – particularly people with disabilities, illness, or language assistance needs – to obtain assistance completing and submitting ballots from individuals they designate.
- Options for requesting, receiving, and returning mail-in ballots should be expanded, while maintaining the security of the voting system. States should offer multiple methods of requesting mail-in ballots, including online, in person, by phone, and by mail. Secure options for returning ballots should be expanded and deadlines for mail-in ballots to be requested and returned should be relaxed.

### **Polling Place Adjustments:**

- Jurisdictions with polling places must follow public health guidelines while continuing to provide voting services at these sites. In-person voting is essential given that many people (including Native American tribes living on tribal lands) do not have access to mail voting. Denying these in-person voting options in some circumstances amounts to a violation of federal voting rights law.
- State and local officials must make any necessary modifications regarding polling place site determinations and administration of those locations. When considering such modifications, election administration officials must identify locations that both protect vulnerable communities and ensure that Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American racial and language minority voters, voters with disabilities, and students have the access they need to cast their vote.
- Jurisdictions should prepare for a surge in provisional voting due to delays in the processing of voter registration applications, voter confusion resulting from polling place closures and consolidations, and unfamiliarity with absentee voting.
- Polling places must be adequately sanitized to prevent transmission of the virus, and should follow [guidance](#) issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (including requiring sick poll workers to stay home, regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces, disinfecting potentially contaminated surfaces, such as voting machines and other equipment, and frequent hand washing and sanitizing).
- Polling places should be reconfigured in order to adhere to “social distancing” protocol, creating additional space between voting booths, poll workers, and voters standing in line.

### **Voter Education and Combating Misinformation:**

- States must undertake aggressive voter education campaigns as they make necessary changes to their policies and practices, and must additionally counter any disinformation (intentional or not) with facts and accurate information.



If states and localities act swiftly, we can create an elections system that operates safely, efficiently, and accessible to all. Under no circumstances should the November general election be canceled or postponed, as that date is mandated by federal law. Indeed, the very purpose of these policy recommendations is to provide guidance on how each state can administer their elections without disenfranchising any of our fellow citizens.

In times of crisis, our nation comes together for the sake of the country and our collective communities. We are in a state of national crisis now; that is why it's all the more important that we band together to safeguard both our health and our democracy. We must not sacrifice one for the other.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.