

Voting and COVID-19 Messaging Updated April 2, 2020

Topline messages

- ❖ **Administering elections during a pandemic is new territory for the United States. But we do not have to choose between public health and a functioning democracy.** We must ensure everyone stays healthy and ensure that everyone can register, cast a ballot, and have their vote counted. The choices we make now will determine not just how we weather the outbreak of this virus, but also the kind of democracy we will have when it's over.
- ❖ **States must move now to make our elections more secure, more efficient, and more accessible to all eligible voters, all while protecting public health and safety.** That's a massive undertaking that we must take seriously. And it's going to take more than the \$400 million that Congress has provided. In the next coronavirus response package, Congress must provide at least \$2 billion to help states implement comprehensive changes that must include protections for the health and safety of poll workers and voters, expanded registration options, expanded early voting to prevent lines and crowded polling places where people could be exposed to the virus, and vote-by-mail. No one method is a panacea on its own.
- ❖ **Rather than asking millions of voters to follow a one-size-fits-all approach, policymakers must give voters multiple options for casting a vote in this year's elections without overly burdensome restrictions.** When states take a comprehensive approach and deploy creative solutions that protect voters' health and safety and maintain access for all, voters can be assured they can cast a ballot without unnecessary barriers. That's going to be vital for people without Internet and mail access, those who need assistance voting in their primary language, many Native Americans, and people with disabilities who rely on voting machines to vote.

Vote By Mail is not the Only Solution: Factoids

- ❖ People without Internet and mail access, those who need assistance voting in their primary language, many Native Americans, and people with disabilities who rely on voting machines to cast a private and independent ballot may be disenfranchised if polling places are closed.
- ❖ Many Native Americans, especially those who live on reservations, do not have traditional street addresses.
 - ❑ In Arizona, for example, only 18% of voters living on reservations outside of Maricopa and Pima Counties have physical addresses and receive mail at home.
 - ❑ The Navajo Nation, the largest reservation in the United States—the size of West Virginia, does not have an addressing program, and most people live in remote communities ¹

- ❖ In addition, many voters who need language assistance would still need accommodations that are best handled in-person. Federal law requires more than 260 jurisdictions to provide language assistance to voters²
- ❖ Some voters are reluctant to cast their vote by mail and voters of color are more likely to have those ballots rejected when they do.
 - An ACLU FL study found that “younger voters, Black voters, and Latino voters are more likely to have their vote-by-mail ballots rejected than older voters and White voters”.³
 - The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law found that only 2.5 percent of White voters in Gwinnett County, GA had their absentee ballots rejected in 2018, compared to 14.8 percent of Asian American voters, 8 percent of Black voters, and 4.3 percent of Latino voters.⁴
- ❖ In 2018, between 430,000 and 2.5M mail-in ballots were rejected. The two biggest reasons for rejection were voter signature issues and ballots received past the deadline.⁵
- ❖ Inaccessibility in both vote by mail systems and at polling places persist nationwide. Providing adequate access to voters with all types of disabilities requires a broad range of options for ballot casting.
 - Voters with disabilities self-select the voting method that is most accessible to their unique access needs. A Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations study found that 52.9% of people with disabilities voted at their polling site on Election Day, while 29% of people with disabilities voted by mail during the 2018 Primary Election.⁶
 - Many voters with disabilities prefer to cast their ballot at a polling place on Election Day, and every polling place in the U.S. is required to have at least one accessible voting device (equipped with earphones and other types of accommodation). Voters with disabilities who are unable to mark paper ballots without assistance rely on the accessible voting station to privately and independently cast their ballots, as required by federal law.
 - In 2012, 10% of people with disabilities who voted by mail reported that they had problems with completing their mail-in ballot and needed assistance in filling out or sending their ballot, violating the Help America Vote Act mandate of a private and independent ballot.⁷

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- ② The paper ballots used in a vote by mail system are not accessible to some voters with disabilities, including those who are blind or low vision, those with limited or no manual dexterity, and those with limited literacy. For instance, a voter who is blind would not be able to see and mark a paper ballot, and the U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2016 that the blind and low vision population alone represents 2.4% of the U.S. population.