



August 4, 2020

Senator Pat Toomey  
248 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Toomey,

As Christians, we are called to care for and to protect the most vulnerable members in society. The principles of Catholic Social Justice also tell us that we have a responsibility to participate in politics out of a concern for, and commitment to, the good of the community. In a secular democracy, the right to vote is the closest thing we have to a sacrament. Catholic Sisters are keenly familiar with the challenges that this pandemic presents for the most vulnerable in our society.

The COVID-19 pandemic is revealing so many ways that our nation falls short in protecting the most vulnerable. In particular, older people and people with underlying health issues are feeling discounted and endangered by risky policies and decisions that fail to put lives first. As the economy continues opening up and infection rates swell, those fearful of risking their lives feel like afterthoughts. Those at highest risk from the virus must remain in isolation and give up participating in many aspects of society to protect themselves.

But no one should have to choose between their health and their fundamental right to vote—and no one needs to if our election administrators are given the resources they need. COVID-19 has already had real and substantial impacts on several state primary elections that could have been avoided. State officials scrambled to balance public health notices and stay at home restrictions with voting rights and election turn-out. In many cases these primaries ended up confusing, endangering, frustrating, and sometimes disenfranchising voters.

We are gravely concerned about the implications of these primaries on the general election in November. Congress must take steps now to provide states with emergency funding and guidance to address both voting rights and public safety concerns. Over 550 public health and political science experts from 47 states across the country signed an open statement about the importance of making proactive reforms to protect the health and safety of voters in the upcoming elections (1). There is a clear path forward to conduct fair and successful elections in the midst of a pandemic. However, that path requires Congress to pass \$3.6B in funding to support state and local authorities for necessary safety measures like:

- Expanding vote by mail options with paid postage
- Adjusting polling place operations to avoid crowds and allow for social distancing

- Recruiting a new generation of poll workers, since most are over 60 and considered high-risk
- Providing online registrations options for voters.
- Educating the public about operational changes that might impact how they cast their ballots

Sen. Toomey, as a Catholic person of faith, we are asking you to enable each and every American to participate in our election come November. We depend on lawmakers like you to provide our elderly and most vulnerable voters with an assurance that they will at least be able to make their voices heard by safely casting a ballot. Please pass \$3.6B in emergency election funding so that our general election does not become another instance where those at highest risk lose their right to participate in civil society.

Sincerely,

[the below 271 Catholic Sisters]

Source:

(1) <https://ucs-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/science-and-democracy/polsci-and-pubhealth-open-letter.pdf>

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Sr. Pat Ash, SSJ  
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Sr. Janelle Banko, SHS  
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Sr. Peg Boyle, SSJ  
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