

May 4, 2020

Dear Member of Congress,

The undersigned faith-based organizations, on behalf of the Faithful Democracy coalition, are calling for the federal government to protect voting rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. We come from a variety of faith perspectives, and as people of faith we know that times of suffering can be transformational—often leading to fresh insights and deeper wisdom. This is true for individuals, for communities and for civil society. Our nation will have moved through a painful period of hardship and soul-searching when the 2020 election takes place in November. We must ensure that we are fully capable of choosing our path forward at that time—this can only happen with full participation of voters.

We live in very uncertain times: chaos is impacting our economy, our healthcare systems are overwhelmed and civil society has been dramatically reshaped. We cannot risk undermining our foundational democratic systems. The federal government must enable states and local jurisdictions to prepare for an historic election, even in the midst of this crisis. Planning and preparations must begin now to protect the integrity of the 2020 election and ensure that new protocols for voter participation are safe and accessible.

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. The \$400M for elections in the CARES Act was a welcome start but is woefully insufficient. Faithful Democracy is calling for \$4 billion in the next response package for the Election Assistance Commission to uphold a safe and secure general election and to support states and localities still facing risks with primary elections. The additional funds would support the following:

- No-excuse absentee voting with prepaid postage available to all registered voters during an emergency.
- Extended Voter Registration Period with at least 15 days of early voting
- Same day registration.
- Election contingency plans to protect the health and safety of poll workers and voters for those who cannot vote absentee.
- Online voter registration.

We must have as many safe voting opportunities as possible. Accordingly, we urge Congress to address funding issues at the USPS to ensure that the necessary public infrastructure is fully operational and capable of handling surges of voting by mail around primaries and the general election. Finally, the matching requirement for HAVA elections funding must be waived for states and localities, which are under extreme financial strain in this crisis.

As the Coronavirus pandemic continues, the United States must act to protect the voting rights of all Americans, particularly communities of color and other historically excluded people. Otherwise, there will be more efforts to suppress voter turn-out similar to the primary in Wisconsin, further marginalizing communities like Black voters. As we approach November, we must prevent voter suppression in state primaries and ensure that all Americans can participate in the upcoming general election. Congress has explicit constitutional authority to protect the right to vote in federal elections and must use that authority now to safeguard the 2020 election. Not to do so during this time of crisis would be a breach of trust with the American people. It is possible during this time to protect our democracy while protecting each other.

NATIONAL FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance of Baptists
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Disciples Center for Public Witness
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Faith in Public Life
Faithful America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Interfaith Power & Light
Islamic Society of North America
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Poligon Education Fund
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness
School Sisters of St. Francis. U.S. Province
School Sisters of Notre Dame, CP Shalom Office
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

STATE AND LOCAL FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Sisters of Saint Francis Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Milwaukee Archdiocese

Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes - Wisconsin

Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa

Pilgrim United Church of Christ

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

Reclaim Our Democracy -Massachusetts

School Sisters of St Francis of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

North Carolina Council of Churches

Faith Action Network - Washington State

COASAP - Iowa

Franciscans for Justice - California