July 17, 2020

The Honorable Mike Braun
374 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Braun,

As Christians, we are called to care for the frail and the elderly and to protect the most vulnerable members in society. Catholic social teaching also tells 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 and the gifts that come with growing old, so we write to you out of concern and empathy for the elderly.

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 (Open Letter to Protect Vulnerable Populations During the 2020 Elections). 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.
• Education the public about operational changes that might impact how they cast their ballots

Senator Braun, as a Catholic person of faith, we are asking you to enable each and every American to participate in our election come November. We are also reminding you of your unique responsibility to look out for the well-being of the elderly due to your position on the Joint Committee on Aging. 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 more than 150 Indiana Catholic Sisters listed below*

Sr. Maureen Abbott, SP  
St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana

Sr. Rebecca Abel, OSB  
Ferdinand, Indiana

Sr. Betty Anderson, OLVM  
Huntington, Indiana

Sr. Kathleen Antol, BVM  
South Bend, Indiana

Sr. Bridget Arnold, OSF  
Evansville, Indiana

Sr. Jean Ballard, OSB  
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West Terre Haute, Indiana

Sr. Barbara Battista, SP  
St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana

Sr. Judith Anne Beattie, CSC  
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Sr. Jane Becker, OSB  
Ferdinand, Indiana

Sr. Mary Beckman, OSB  
Ferdinand, Indiana

Sr. Shirley Bell, PHJC  
Plymouth, Indiana

Sr. Laurette Bellamy, SP  
Greenwood, Indiana

Sr. Editha Ben, SP  
St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana

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Oldenburg, Indiana

Sr. Sr. Jane Breen, OSB  
Ferdinand, Indiana

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Beech Grove, Indiana
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| Indianapolis, Indiana |
| Sr. Susan Hooks, OSB |
| Ferdinand, Indiana |</p>
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