

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

As you know, the spread of COVID-19 presents an imposing threat to our citizens, our economy, and our way of life. As Congress takes further measures to address this threat, I urge you to continue to prioritize swift and strong action to prepare our electoral system for this pandemic, and to make sure that no future disaster threatens American citizens' ability to go to the polls.

Fair and credible elections are the backbone of our democracy. In the past, Americans have overcome disastrous weather events and economic strife to make themselves heard at the polls. However, COVID-19 presents a new and unprecedented challenge to this process. In order to combat this crisis, we have asked our constituents to isolate themselves and to avoid large gatherings and social contact. Though these measures are essential to combat the spread of this virus, they are also at odds with the voting process for many Americans. While we hope for a quick end to this crisis, we must plan for the likelihood that COVID-19 will continue to impact Americans' lives through the rest of the year.

As the November presidential election and other primary elections approach, we cannot ask the American people to choose between their physical well-being and their ability to vote. The CARES Act -- signed into law last month -- included \$400 million to help adapt elections for the COVID-19 crisis. While this is an important first step, there is still much more work to be done. Fortunately, there are several policies that can be included in the forthcoming supplemental appropriations package to facilitate the continued functioning of our electoral process through both the current and future crises.

First, Congress should act to require that all states provide at least 15 days of early in-person voting, as well as no-excuse absentee voting by mail for federal elections in 2020. While many states have already adopted these measures, some have not, and early and absentee voting will be essential to make sure that Americans can continue to cast their ballots without risking their health. States should also offer applications for absentee ballots online to further facilitate compliance with distancing recommendations. Finally, states should be required to begin processing absentee ballots at least 14 days before Election Day. At a minimum, this processing should include the opening of envelopes and prepping of ballots to be tabulated on Election Day. This will help election officials manage the increase in absentee ballots without delaying results.

Second, Congress should provide additional, flexible funding to states to help them implement early and absentee voting, as well as other policies to administer elections throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, the estimated cost of retooling our elections for the COVID-19 crisis is approximately \$2 billion.<sup>1</sup> While the \$400 million of funding included in the CARES Act is a critical step forward, this funding requires a 20% match from states at a time when their budgets are stretched thin and when state legislatures are struggling to operate under strict social distancing requirements. Additional funding will be necessary to help states print additional ballots, purchase postage, and acquire additional equipment, technology, and software to support the printing and processing of ballots. Other allowable costs for such funding should include the recruitment or hiring of additional temporary staff, communication efforts to inform citizens of changes in the voting process, and the purchasing of protective equipment and cleaning supplies. Current capacity for these processes varies by state and locality. Thus, additional funding should be given under flexible terms, without a required match, to empower state and local election officials to use funds quickly and appropriately to improve their ability to administer elections.

Third, Congress should require that states create and publicize contingency plans to enable Americans to vote in the case of future crises. These plans should include details on emergency poll locations, measures to protect the health of poll workers, and plans for recruiting workers from populations that are resilient or unaffected by the crisis. They should also include plans for expanding the availability of vote by mail or early voting services to address future restrictions on regular voting processes. No crisis should ever threaten Americans' confidence in our elections, and publicly available plans will help reassure citizens that their rights will not be jeopardized by future disasters.

As elected representatives of the American people, it is our responsibility to ensure that our constituents' voices are heard -- and that responsibility only grows in times of great crisis. For that reason, I urge you to act in bipartisan cooperation to prepare our electoral system to withstand the impacts of the COVID-19 and future crises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Elissa Slotkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and a stylized "S".

Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress

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<sup>1</sup> "Brennan Center Responds to Stimulus Package's Insufficient Funding for Protecting 2020 Election Against Coronavirus," Brennan Center for Justice, March 25, 2020, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/brennan-center-responds-stimulus-packages-insufficient-funding-protecting>.

### **List of Cosigners**

Stephen Lynch  
Ro Khanna  
Jimmy Panetta  
Frederica Wilson  
Judy Chu  
Jerry McNerney  
Jim Cooper  
Dan Kildee  
Lauren Underwood  
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Seth Moulton  
Mary Gay Scanlon  
Josh Harder  
Ann Kirkpatrick  
John Yarmuth  
Jamie Raskin  
Dwight Evans  
Steven Horsford  
Lisa Blunt Rochester  
Conor Lamb  
Barbara Lee  
David N. Cicilline  
Anna G. Eshoo  
Alcee L. Hastings  
Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Jim Himes  
Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Jahana Hayes  
Joe Courtney  
Grace F. Napolitano  
Derek Kilmer  
Jackie Speier  
Alan Lowenthal  
Jared Huffman  
Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
Peter Welch  
Joe Neguse  
Darren Soto  
Carolyn B. Maloney  
Julia Brownley  
Wm. Lacy Clay  
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Katie Porter  
Marcy Kaptur  
Gerald E. Connolly  
Salud O. Carbajal  
Sylvia R. Garcia  
Sean Casten  
Ann McLane Kuster  
Jimmy Gomez  
Cindy Axne  
Ed Case  
Veronica Escobar  
Tom Malinowski  
Madeleine Dean  
Ami Bera, M.D.  
Lizzie Fletcher  
Angie Craig  
Dean Phillips  
Haley M. Stevens  
Mikie Sherrill  
Donna Shalala  
Diana DeGette  
James P. McGovern  
Harley Rouda  
Andy Levin  
Mark Takano  
Lucy McBath