



COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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June 16, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy and Leader Schumer,

On behalf of the Committee on Economic Development of The Conference Board, the non-profit, non-partisan business led think tank whose Trustees include over 160 current and former CEOs, we urge Congress to immediately provide the necessary funding to states and localities to ensure they can implement the procurement, training, and adjustments needed to conduct a safe, accessible, and credible election.

The COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc on campaigns, party conventions, and the most sacred of democratic principles—the ability to vote. Policymakers and election officials must act now to ensure that COVID-19 is not a deterrent to participation and that the election offers an accessible and credible way for eligible voters to make themselves heard.

With the support of federal funding, commonsense options already practiced in many parts of the country should be implemented nationwide.

During a continuing public health emergency, all would-be voters must be able to easily obtain and cast a postage-paid mail-in ballot and policymakers must make sure there are enough ballots to meet the expected increase in demand. All states should allow easy access voting by mail without requiring any justification on the part of the voter. No-excuse-necessary early voting is already offered by two-thirds of the states. Minimizing the in-person contact required to vote is the strongest possible safeguard for the health of voters and poll workers.

Significant periods of early voting—at least partially offered by most states—would allow safer, less trafficked polling places on election day and guarantee that eligible voters can safely make their choices count. Every state should offer *at least* 10 days of early voting, including weekends and evenings.

Election officials must ensure that poll workers, voters, and their communities have the protective equipment, supplies, and training they need to keep polling places safe.

Additionally, ensuring a credible election—one that builds rather than degrades trust in the outcome—requires preparation, training, and education. Challenges in recent primary elections have further illustrated the importance of early action now to ensure a trustworthy process. More trained personnel will be needed to make sure the mail-in votes are counted in a timely and trusted manner and measures for transparency in the mail balloting process will further engender trust.

Americans demand integrity in their election results even under extraordinary circumstances and these are extraordinary times in our nation’s history. We hope that motivates bipartisan support in Congress for investments that ensure that credibility without making it more difficult for eligible voters to safely access the ballot.

With the pandemic draining state and local finances, only Congress can provide the necessary funding. Skimping on preparing for full and safe participation is a false economy the U.S. cannot afford.

As trusted voices in their communities, business leaders can and should also play a critical role. CED plans to be a part of this effort and believes that policymakers on the federal and state levels should also work to collaborate with the business community. They can provide needed infrastructure and technology assistance pro bono (as several businesses have already done since 2016) and also reach out to help voters—especially their employees and customers—understand all the options for voting while remaining safe. Further, they can create reminders and provide opportunities for their own employees to vote early, reducing their communities’ risks and pressures on Election Day, as well as offer flexible policies for those employees wishing to vote on Election Day itself.

Time is of the essence for action to protect the health of our democracy. This will take a concerted effort on the part of federal, state, and local officials and leaders. But Washington, acting together across party lines, must first lead the way.

Respectfully,

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