



April 16, 2020

To: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate

From: Virginia Kase, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Additional stimulus funding related to COVID-19

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of our more than 500,000 members and supporters, the League of Women Voters of the United States urges you to include policies in the next COVID-19 stimulus bill that that will protect our elections, protect all families regardless of immigration status, and re-classify the District of Columbia, while continuing to help families, communities, and workers facing hardship due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The League believes that funding and support of our communities is essential during this time. Congress must focus their efforts to repair a downward turning economy, put people back on their feet after unforeseeable job and income loss, and ensure the safety of all communities. But we also urge Congress to pass additional measures in the next stimulus bill that would fully fund state election efforts and direct states and counties to administer the 2020 elections in a safe, fair, and accessible manner through expanded early voting, preserving in-person voting options, and by instituting universal no-excuse absentee voting.

To adequately undertake these important measures to ensure the remaining primary elections and the November 2020 elections safe, will require adequate funding that only the federal government can provide. Congress must provide states with at least \$4 billion to prepare for the remaining 2020 elections, in a timely manner. In the last coronavirus response package, Congress provided only \$400 million to states for election assistance. While a step in the right direction, that sum will defray only a fraction of the costs associated with implementing the necessary adjustments to safeguard the electoral process. **In its next package, Congress must provide an additional \$3.6 billion to help states prepare for 2020 elections amid the COVID-19 crisis.**

States must be free to allocate this funding to their elections without requirements to match any or all of the funding provided by the federal government. States are already experiencing increased costs associated with containing the pandemic and fighting to overcome severe

damage to their economies. Any funding allocated by Congress must include accountability measures that provide latitude to states for instituting precautionary measures around elections, while ensuring that the earmarked funding for elections is directed towards response efforts related to the upcoming elections.

Many voters – particularly people of color, Native Americans, people with disabilities, limited-English proficient citizens, students, and other historically marginalized citizens –will not have equal access to the ballot box, and the promise of our democracy will not be fulfilled unless states offer voters a range of options through which to submit completed ballots. **Voters, armed with options, can make election day plans that best suit them.**

The League suggests that the additional \$3.6 Billion dollars that Congress must allocate be used to do the following:

Voter Education:

- Elections administrators must conduct public education by publishing changes to their official websites and promoting these sites to voters. The League recommends that changes be published within three hours of final decisions being made prior to election day and as soon as practicable on election day.
- States and jurisdictions must undertake robust voter education campaigns as they make necessary changes to their policies and practices and must actively work to quash information that will cause voter confusion and frustration by disseminating inaccurate information. With seven months until the general election, states have a critical opportunity to begin preparations to position states with a smoother administration of upcoming elections.

Voter Registration:

- Online voter registration should be accessible to all. Voters should be allowed to check their registration and update their information through an online portal.
- State election officials should be prepared for an influx of users and ensure that stable and secure systems are in place that can handle a large amount of traffic.
- Election day registration or same day registration can be universally used in all states and jurisdictions. Voters should be allowed to register or update their information on Election Day and cast a regular ballot.
- Voter registration deadlines should comply with the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). If election dates are moved, states should extend registration deadlines to comply with the NVRA, which will reduce voter confusion related to deadlines and minimize NVRA challenges.

Early In-Person Voting:

- States should expand early voting options especially weekend hours on the weekend before Election Day.

- Between 14 and 30 days of early in-person voting should be allowed, including the weekend before Election Day, to reduce long lines and administrative stress on Election Day.
- Early voting sites should follow the same procedures outlined for polling places (see below).
- Elections administrators must educate the public about the option to vote early and encourage voters to take advantage of this policy.
- Administrators should also publish changes to their official websites and promote these sites to voters. The League recommends that changes be published within 3 hours of final decisions being made.

Expanded Access to Absentee Mail-In Ballots:

- All states should move to include a no-excuse absentee system and any eligible voter in the state should be allowed to request a mail-in ballot while preserving some in-person locations.
- Absentee mail-in ballots should include instructions on how to cast their ballots and all options for returning ballots should be clearly explained to the voter.
- In states where ballots are required to be returned by mail, postage should be pre-paid by the appropriate government entity within the state or jurisdiction. The federal government must provide funding to states for any expansion to the mail-in provisions in times of national emergencies or pandemics. Reimbursement programs should be explicitly rejected since states and local election officials are unlikely to have funds to successfully implement and scale up expanded mail in options.
- States must allow voters who need assistance to designate individuals to provide support completing and submitting ballots, including voters with disability, illness, or who have language access needs.
- Options for requesting, receiving, and returning mail-in ballots should be expanded, while maintaining the security of the voting system and ensure that administrators are effectively trained on accessing the influx of these types of ballots in ways are inclusive of communities of color.
- States should offer multiple methods of requesting mail-in ballots, including online, in person, by phone, and by mail.
- Secure options for returning ballots should be expanded and deadlines for mail-in ballots to be requested and returned should be relaxed. Where possible, voters should be allowed to return ballots to any polling location in the appropriate county or jurisdiction.

Polling Place Adjustments:

- Elections officials should follow the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) during a national pandemic.
- Polling places must be adequately sanitized to prevent transmission of the virus, and should follow guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(including requiring sick poll workers to stay home, regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces, disinfecting potentially contaminated surfaces, such as voting machines and other equipment, and frequent hand washing and sanitizing).

- Polling places should be reconfigured in order to adhere to “social distancing” protocol, demarking the space between voting booths, poll workers, and voters standing in line.
- Jurisdictions with polling places must follow public health guidelines while continuing to provide voting services at these sites. In-person voting is essential given that many people (including Native American tribes living on tribal lands) do not have access to mail voting. Denying these in-person voting options in some circumstances amounts to a violation of federal voting rights law.
- State and local officials must make any necessary modifications regarding polling place site determinations and administration of those locations. When considering such modifications, election administration officials must identify locations that both protect vulnerable communities and ensure that Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American racial and language minority voters, voters with disabilities, and students have the access they need to cast their vote.
- Jurisdictions should prepare for a surge in provisional voting due to delays in the processing of voter registration applications, voter confusion resulting from polling place closures and consolidations, and unfamiliarity with absentee voting.

The voting rights principles outlined will ensure voters can safely participate in elections in 2020 and these policy recommendations were carefully crafted with longstanding League positions at top of mind and reconciled with our work with coalition voting rights partners in response to the current global pandemic. The League has joined with many coalition partners to call for these measures. Election experts and administrators agree that, if states and counties are to run safe and effective elections in 2020, they must have adequate resources to provide **both** vote-by-mail and in-person options.

In addition to ensuring that every person can participate in our democracy, we must ensure that all families and individuals, regardless of their immigration or tax status, receive aid from the government. Immigrants are a vital part of our communities and economy. The following principles must be included in the next stimulus bill:

- Ensure that access to health care is available regardless of a person’s immigration status, income or categorical eligibility. Testing and treatment of COVID 19 symptoms and related health conditions, and vaccines (when available) should be covered through emergency Medicaid and other Medicaid options.
- Ensure access to the stimulus rebates for everyone who files tax returns, whether they use a Social Security Number or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number.
- Ensure access to nutrition assistance through programs like the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) and extend the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program through the summer of 2020.

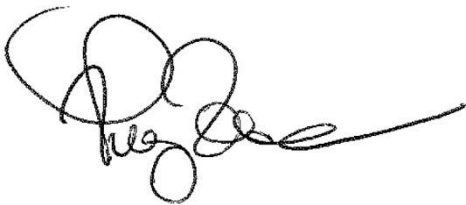
- Ensure that health services, and information about COVID-19 and about how to access benefit programs is available in multiple languages and through trusted community providers and that providers have the resources they need to access interpretation services.
- Ensure adequate funding for Community Health Centers, which are essential providers in many immigrant and low-income communities.

If we are serious about addressing the full scale of this public health emergency, we can no longer afford to leave out millions of our community members from the response and must ensure that everyone has access to the health care, nutrition and income support they need.

Finally, Congress must make the District of Columbia (DC) whole. DC is not a territory as other longstanding territories contiguous to the United States. DC bears all the responsibilities of citizenship and deserves the benefits that other states receive. Inclusion of DC in the list of territories, rather than allocating funding like that of other states was an intentional political maneuver. The health, welfare, and lives of American citizens are on the line during this pandemic and it's time to stop gambling with the lives of the more than seven hundred thousand American people who call Washington, DC home. Washington, DC, like every state in the nation, is dealing with unprecedented challenges and, like every state, needs the full support and resources of the federal government to ensure the safety and well-being of DC's residents.

It is the job of Congress to protect the safety, well-being, and participation of the American people, no matter where they come from. In recent weeks, Congress has demonstrated to the American public that it can come together for the good of the nation during these trying times. We urge you to take the additional necessary steps during your next legislative efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that no individual living in the United States—neither citizens, nor those on the path towards citizenship, nor a statehood designation-- -- is left out as we work together to protect the country and safeguard our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Virginia Kase', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Virginia Kase



Chief Executive Officer
League of Women Voters of the United States