



**Statement for the record, House Administration Subcommittee on Elections Hearing:
“Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters”
September 16, 2025**

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of the United States (the League), thank you for offering the opportunity to discuss the impact of natural disasters on our elections. In the United States, the right to vote is one of the most basic promises of our democracy. Protecting the right to vote for all is a constant endeavor that requires our nation to assess and address any barriers for eligible voters to cast a ballot and have it counted.

The League is a 105-year-old nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to ensure that everyone is represented in our democracy. Founded following the ratification of the 19th Amendment, the League began its work helping newly enfranchised women cast their ballots. We are a grassroots organization comprised of over one million members and supporters in all 50 states and DC, with more than 750 local and state Leagues. The League is nonpartisan — neither supporting nor opposing candidates or political parties at any level of government — and is committed to protecting the freedom to vote. The League uses advocacy, education, litigation, and organizing to achieve our mission to empower voters and defend democracy. We base our work on policy positions developed through consensus by League membership to ensure our advocacy reflects best practices and a nationwide perspective.

When natural disasters happen, all parts of a community are impacted, including voting. Unfortunately, voting is often the last thing on the minds of officials following a natural disaster. While officials should focus on the basic survival of their citizens, we must also focus on the importance of civic participation. It is imperative that our electoral system has an existing structure in place to be prepared for the disruptions caused in the voter registration and ballot casting processes before a natural disaster strikes. Every citizen deserves to have their voice heard, and no one should lose that opportunity because they are a victim of a natural disaster.

When disasters cause damage to our communities, families may lose important documentation to register to vote or be prevented from going to their local board of elections to register by the voter registration deadline. If roads are blocked, homes destroyed, power lost, access to internet and cell service disrupted, or government buildings closed when a voter registration deadline passes, many voters – who are already going through the traumatic process of rebuilding their lives – will be prevented from registering in time. It’s times like these that the League steps up to assist voters to find the information they need to exercise the right to vote, ensure that state and local elections officials can serve their local populations, and look for ways to remove any outstanding barriers they may be facing together. Some of the reforms that are needed to ensure natural disaster preparedness include:

- **Extending voter registration timelines:** While the League works all year long to ensure that people are registered to vote, there are always reasons that voters might need to register or update their registration at the last minute due to changes of address, and even newly eligible registrants. It is unfortunately common for voters to miss registration and ballot submission deadlines following natural disasters. Widespread flooding, damaged roadways, power and internet outages, the closure of county board of election offices, and even disruptions to power and internet can get in the way of ensuring that a voter can register to vote. In some cases, courts have extended deadlines to allow voters the necessary time to register or vote, but it is not a given. The League is no stranger to asking boards of elections to extend voter registration deadlines in times of disaster. In 2016, Hurricane Matthew made landfall in Florida, 4 days prior to the voter registration deadline. The League worked to advocate for an extension of the deadline with state officials and ultimately filed a lawsuit in federal court to have the deadline extended. At the time, statistics showed that up to 20% of all new registrants in Florida were received in the week before the registration deadline.¹ When the ability to collect voter registrations by the appropriate government agencies is disrupted, that hurts voters wishing to register and cast a ballot. To minimize this, the extension of voter registration deadlines is a minimal change needed.
- **Extending early voting and absentee voting:** Vital services can be affected following a natural disaster. This includes disruption of mail services, impacts to vital public resources like libraries, and impacts to power and utility services. When the mail is disrupted, this may affect how absentee ballots are able to be returned. For voters who have already requested a ballot be mailed to them or may have them in hand, this means ensuring that their ballots can be accepted by a postmarked date, allowing them to be dropped off at Election Day polling locations, or allowing voters to cast a ballot at an early voting site. Early voting can allow voters to ensure their vote is cast. Early voting during seasons prone to natural disasters should consider the addition of early voting sites, extension of hours and days that early voting can occur, and ensuring the flexibility to remove early voting sites that may have been adversely affected by the disaster event. In 2024, Hurricane Helene devastated many counties across North Carolina. The NC State Board of Elections addressed the needs of its counties, including clarifying the actions that county boards of elections could take to ensure early voting and absentee ballots were accessible to the affected individuals.²
- **Dedicated funding to strengthen plans during natural and climate-related crises:** Voters deserve the opportunity to cast a ballot no matter the state of their surroundings. Whether it's flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, or other impacts of disasters, elections officials need to have plans in place to protect the right to vote. Congress should offer dedicated funding that allows elections officials to have contingency plans in place. It is crucial that we have robust plans in place in advance of a

¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/after-hurricane-league-women-voters-asks-judge-extend-floridas-voter>

² https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/State_Board_Meeting_Docs/2024-10-07/20241007%20Emergency%20Resolution%20for%2013%20WNC%20Counties_Final_Signed.pdf?inline=1



natural disaster that allow voters the time needed to register and vote when our communities experience catastrophic weather events beyond our control. Congress can provide a grant to do this through the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), as they have done with previous funding granted under the *Help America Vote Act*.

Instituting same-day voter registration: In order to avoid voters missing registration deadlines, states can institute same-day or Election Day voter registration. This allows eligible voters to register to vote during the early voting period or on Election Day and cast a regular ballot. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia already allow voters to register on Election Day. There is evidence that same-day voter registration increases turnout in elections, protects Americans who fall through the registration cracks, and offers an important avenue for more voters to participate. Same-day registration ensures that the largest number of Americans can exercise their right to vote. This is even more important when voters are facing the effects of natural disasters.³

Increased accessibility to the electoral process is integral to ensuring that every eligible voter can exercise their right to vote in both normal circumstances and times of crisis. Voting is a fundamental right, and all Americans deserve an equal opportunity to make their voices heard in our democracy, including – and especially – when natural disasters strike.

We look forward to being a resource to ensure accessibility for all eligible voters to the ballot box. Please do not hesitate to contact our staff via Jessica Jones Capparell, Director of Government Affairs, at JJones@lww.org, or Kristen Kern, Federal Policy and Advocacy Manager, at KKern@lww.org.

³ https://www.pew.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2009/uwisconsin1pdf.pdf