



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
1335 EAST-WEST HIGHWAY, SUITE 4300
SILVER SPRING, MD 20910

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman, Committee on Rules & Administration
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Committee on Rules & Administration
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Klobuchar,

I want to thank you for hosting an important and timely hearing on preparations for the 2020 general election. As you know, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission is an independent, bi-partisan federal agency created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002,¹ which tasks the agency with helping election officials improve the administration of elections and helping Americans participate in the voting process.

The Novel Coronavirus, or COVID-19, has presented unprecedented challenges around our country. Amid the ongoing debates about the health of our communities and our economy, election administrators face the difficult task of determining how to best conduct safe, secure, accessible and accurate elections. At the EAC, we have pivoted substantially to focus our attention on how we can support state and local election officials as they make tough decisions about their remaining primaries and the general election.

Through the Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council (GCC) and Sector Coordinating Council's (SCC) Joint COVID Working Group, the EAC has helped to disseminate a series of documents that provide guidance on considerations for how to administer and secure election infrastructure in light of COVID-19.² We will continue to work with our partners at the federal, state and local level, as well as private industry, to ensure the safest and most secure systems of voting.

Knowing that more Americans than ever are voting by mail or absentee ballot during this pandemic, the EAC has also worked with the states who had previously implemented vote by mail systems to identify lessons learned and best practices to be shared. The states or

¹ 42 U.S.C. § 20901 et seq.

² U.S. Election Assistance Comm., *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources*, available at <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/coronavirus-covid-19-resources>.

jurisdictions that had previously moved to mail driven elections had years or even decades to make the transition. Election administrators that are currently expanding their mail and absentee operations, however, do not enjoy this same luxury. Learning from their colleagues will be crucial to successfully implementing procedures to handle the anticipated surge in mail and absentee ballot demand this year.

Toward this effort, EAC held bipartisan hearings with election officials from across the country to highlight the challenges of balancing fair, accessible, and transparent elections that also provide for the physical safety of voters and elections officials during the primary election season.³ With some reassurance that their experiences amid this pandemic provide lessons for November, election officials consistently summarized their approach to the general election as one where they, “hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.” To implement these lessons, the election officials emphasized the need for additional resources that can supplement and relieve the financial burden on state and local jurisdictions.

Among their primary concerns, election officials anticipate using more mail and absentee ballots than they did during the primaries, which in many instances, reached record highs. To respond to the demand, witnesses highlighted the following needs (among many others): technology to process, track, and secure ballot requests; tools to verify and count absentee and mail-in ballots; Postal Service logistics; increased coordination with outside vendors; and additional voter and public education about the absentee and mail ballot process.

We know that many jurisdictions cannot realistically transition to full vote by mail, and that to do so would risk disenfranchising many Americans. As a result, many jurisdictions are seeing significant cost increases associated with running both the largest mail and absentee election they have ever had to run, while also providing for polling locations that are as safe as possible for voters and poll workers. That means polling places that allow for proper social distancing, personal protective equipment, hand sanitizing and hand washing options as well as regular disinfecting of voting equipment and regularly touched surfaces. These challenges are made more difficult to plan and budget for because historical rates of voter turnout provide less guidance for anticipating the level of in-person and mail or absentee voting this November.

Over the next several months, election officials must also provide resources, retain, recruit, and train poll workers, ensure the availability of sufficient polling places, and promote early, in-person voting and mail-in ballots to reduce election day lines and crowding.

While unprecedented, these challenges are not insurmountable. Based on the extensive feedback our dedicated state and local election officials have provided from the primary election season, we know what needs to be done and the resources to succeed.

While state and local officials are primarily responsible for conducting and funding elections, no one could have prepared for the expenses associated with conducting elections during this

³ U.S. Election Assistance Comm., *Lessons Learned from the 2020 Primary*, available at <https://www.eac.gov/videos/public-hearing-eac-lessons-learned-2020-primary-elections>. See also U.S. Election Assistance Comm., *Election Response to COVID-19 Administering Elections During the Coronavirus Crisis*, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KcIfu_PZgM.

pandemic. The EAC is committed to assisting election officials in any way we can during the remaining months before the November election and stand ready to quickly distribute any additional funding Congress may provide.

If we can be of any assistance to the Committee, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Hovland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Benjamin W. Hovland, Chairman
U.S. Election Assistance Commission