

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2020

Dr. Robert Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA, 30329

Dear Director Redfield:

We write to urge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to issue updated guidance on best practices to keep voters, poll workers, and election workers safe during upcoming primaries and the general elections. Due to the virus' mode of transmission, public health experts and election officials agree that voting must be made safer through the expansion of early in-person voting, which reduces lines and crowds at polling locations, voting by mail, and the implementation of safety measures to protect election workers and in-person voters. To ensure election officials and voters are prepared to overcome the challenges brought on by this pandemic, the CDC should provide comprehensive and up-to-date public health guidance for voting by mail and in-person voting.

Republican and Democratic election officials across the country have been clear that this pandemic is affecting their ability to safely administer elections.¹ Concerns include the ability to adhere to the CDC's physical distancing guidelines in polling locations and election offices, allowing voters and workers to safely handle voting equipment and machines, and the processing of election mail, including absentee ballots. Given these safety concerns, officials in sixteen states have already postponed their presidential primary elections or transitioned to predominantly mail voting.² We have seen the consequences that the lack of preparation and clear safety guidelines can have in Wisconsin, where voters stood in lines that wrapped around blocks wearing home-made masks and garbage bags as personal protective equipment. Reports indicate that health officials have now linked over 50 cases of COVID-19 to voters who showed up to the polls on election day as well as poll workers.³

¹ Katie Hobbs and Kim Wyman, *States Need Billions to Ensure Safe Elections*, CNN, (March 31, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/31/opinions/covid-19-states-billions-election-safety-hobbs-wyman/index.html>

² Nick Corasaniti and Stephanie Saul, *16 States Have Postponed Primaries During the Pandemic*, New York Times, (May 5, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/article/2020-campaign-primary-calendar-coronavirus.html>

³ Associated Press and Scott Bauer, *52 Who Worked or Vote in Wisconsin Elections Have COVID-19*, WUMN, (April 29, 2020) <https://www.wuwm.com/post/52-who-worked-or-voted-wisconsin-election-have-covid-19>

While it is essential for states to expand voting by mail, states must also maintain in-person voting to ensure elections are accessible to all. In-person voting is essential for voters with disabilities who need assistive devices in polling locations, voters who need language assistance, and voters who do not have access to mail. Therefore, additional steps should be taken to ensure in-person voting is safe for both voters and election workers. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has advised states and jurisdictions to follow CDC guidance for election and polling location safety, however, the CDC has not issued comprehensive guidance and has not updated the current guidance since March 27, 2020 – over a month ago.⁴

Nearly 20 states are still scheduled to hold presidential primary elections in the coming months, with even more states holding primaries for other federal offices over the summer. Additionally, the CDC has warned that a second and even more severe outbreak of COVID-19 could emerge this fall in conjunction with the flu season, potentially affecting the general election in November.⁵ Updated and more thorough guidance from the CDC will help voters safely exercise their right to participate in the democratic process and enable election officials, election workers, and poll workers to administer our elections without risking their health. No one should have to choose between exercising their right to vote and protecting their health and the health of their loved ones.

Accordingly, we urge the CDC to take steps to update its recommendations for election and polling place safety and work with the EAC to more thoroughly reflect safety measures that voters, election workers, and poll workers must take to protect themselves and others.

Sincerely,

/s/
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/
Patty Murray
United States Senator

/s/
Mazie Hirono
United States Senator

/s/
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Recommendations for Election Polling Locations* (March 27, 2020) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html>
Election Assistance Commission, Election Management Resources, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources* <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/coronavirus-covid-19-resources>

⁵ Caroline Kelly and Jen Christensen, *CDC Chief Says There Could be Second Possibly Worse Coronavirus Outbreak this Winter*, CNN (April 21, 2020) <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/21/politics/second-coronavirus-cdc-director-robert-redfield/index.html>

/s/

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/

Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/

Doug Jones
United States Senator

/s/

Diane Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

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Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

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Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

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Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

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Tom Udall
United States Senator

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Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

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Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

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Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

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Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

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Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

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Tim Kaine
United States Senator

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Sherrod Brown
United States Senator