



Seeking common ground, working for the common good

July 29, 2020

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Dear Senator Collins,

At the Maine Council of Churches, our advocacy work centers on our [moral agenda](#). We begin and end with the conviction that all persons are equally valued by God, and we advocate for a society that values the sacred worth of every person – no exceptions. As Christians, we are also called to care for the frail and the elderly and to protect the most vulnerable members in society. And so our faith leads us to write to you today, Senator, urging you to include funding in the next COVID-19 package to safeguard the general election in November.

The COVID-19 pandemic is revealing how we, as a nation, fall short in protecting the most vulnerable. Older people and people with underlying health issues are feeling discounted and endangered by risky policies and decisions that fail to put lives first. As the economy continues to reopen and infection rates swell, those most fearful of the threat to their lives feel like afterthoughts. Sadly, those at highest risk from the virus must remain in isolation to protect themselves and thus give up participating in many aspects of society.

But no one should have to choose between their health and their fundamental right to vote—and no one needs to if our election administrators are given the resources they need. State and local officials are trying to balance public health notices and stay-at-home restrictions with voting rights and higher turn-out. We have already seen how the confusing, frustrating, and dangerous changes in some primary elections sometimes disenfranchise voters.

We are gravely concerned about the implications of these primaries on the general election in November. Congress must take steps now to provide states with emergency funding and guidance to address both voting rights and public safety concerns. Over 550 public health and political science experts from 47 states across the country signed an open statement about the importance of making proactive reforms to protect the health and safety of voters in the upcoming elections¹. There is a clear path forward to conduct fair and successful elections during a pandemic. However, that path requires immediate passage of \$3.6B in funding to support state and local authorities for necessary safety measures like:

- Expanding vote-by-mail options with paid postage
- Adjusting polling place operations to avoid crowding and allow for social distancing
- Recruiting younger poll workers, since workers over 60 are considered high-risk
- Providing online registration options for voters
- Educating the public about operational changes that might impact how they cast their ballots.

Senator Collins, we are asking you, as a person of faith, to enable every American to participate in the November election. We also come to you because of your unique responsibility as the Chair of the Joint Special Committee on Aging to protect the wellbeing of the elderly. We depend on lawmakers like you to provide our elderly and most vulnerable voters with an assurance that they can make their voices heard by safely casting a ballot. Please pass \$3.6B in emergency election funding so that our general election does not become another instance where those at highest risk lose their right to participate in civil society.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director

¹ <https://ucs-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/science-and-democracy/polsci-and-pubhealth-open-letter.pdf>