



NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON ELECTION CRISES

April 29, 2020 SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Governors, Legislative Leaders, Secretaries of State, and State Election Directors:

The National Task Force on Election Crises writes to urge you to accelerate preparations in your state to conduct the 2020 general election safely with the possibility of a continued, or renewed, COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the challenges posed by COVID-19, it is imperative that your state mount an ¹ immediate effort to prepare for the worst in November and take action to protect the health of your citizens as they participate in the general election. As the executive, legislative, and electoral leaders of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, your work is critical to ensuring that all eligible voters can vote as safely as possible in the midst of a global health crisis.

We are a cross-partisan group of experts formed to ensure a free and fair 2020 presidential election by recommending responses to a range of potential election crises that could threaten the integrity of the election. COVID-19 presents such a threat — one that will likely exist in November. The Task Force's ² COVID-19 Election Guide (attached) is designed to help state and local policy makers and election officials take the steps necessary for a safe general election, including: maximizing early voting, expanding voting by mail, and instituting safe in-person voting and alternate forms of voting like curbside voting. **We ask that you implement the Task Force's recommendations, accelerate planning for the ³ general election, and request additional funding from the federal government if necessary to fund the new initiatives your state will need to undertake for the November election.**

Already, the pandemic primary season has demonstrated that voters and poll workers are at risk under current election systems. In Wisconsin, at least forty voters and poll workers likely contracted COVID-19 on election day. A poll worker from Illinois's 2020 primary has died and several more have tested ⁴ positive after contracting COVID-19. And in the case of Ohio's primary election on Tuesday, thousands ⁵

¹ The National Task Force on Election Crises is a diverse, cross-partisan group of more than 40 experts in election law, election administration, national security, cybersecurity, voting rights, civil rights, technology, media, public health, and emergency response. The mission of the cross-partisan Task Force is to ensure a free and fair 2020 presidential election by recommending responses to a range of election crises. The only electoral outcome the Task Force advocates is that the election is free and fair. Read more at: <https://www.electiontaskforce.org/about>. ² Dr.

Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said on April 22, "We will have coronavirus in the fall. I am convinced of that." Savannah Behrmann, *'Convinced': Fauci Says There Will Be Coronavirus in the Fall after Trump Says 'It May Not Come Back'*, USA Today (updated Apr. 23, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/04/22/coronavirus-dr-anthony-fauci-says-i-am-convinced-second>



NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON ELECTION CRISES

[d-wave/3009131001/](#).³ National Task Force on Election Crises, *COVID-19 Election Guide* (updated Apr. 17, 2020), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e70e52c7c72720ed714313f/t/5e9a2bbb56774a007cb56028/1587578501423/COVIDguidance>. The COVID-19 Election Guide transcends party and ideology and is intended specifically for the 2020 election. *Id.* at 1. ⁴ Teran Powell, *40 Coronavirus Cases In Milwaukee County Linked To Wisconsin Election, Health Official Says*, WUWM (Apr. 24, 2020), <https://www.wuwm.com/post/40-coronavirus-cases-milwaukee-county-linked-wisconsin-election-health-official-say>.⁵ John Keilman, *After Chicago Poll Worker Dies from COVID-19 and Others Test Positive, City Warns Voters They Might Have Been Exposed to Virus at Polling Places*, Chicago Tribune (Apr. 13, 2020),

of voters who had requested absentee ballots did not receive them by the April 28th deadline as a result of postal service delays. These are deeply concerning warning signs for what could occur in the fall without⁶ proper planning.

In order to promote safe and secure participation in the 2020 general election, and to ensure its legitimacy, the Task Force recommends that state and local policy makers and election officials:

- **Prepare to conduct wide-scale voting by mail.** Depending on the state, this may include proactively mailing absentee ballot request or application forms to all voters; ensuring that the pandemic qualifies as an “excuse” for absentee voting where necessary; extending the deadlines for requesting and returning absentee ballots; waiving witness and notary requirements; and planning ahead to secure adequate supplies and other resources.
- **Ensure that in-person voting is as safe and accessible as possible.** This includes maximizing early voting days and hours; increasing access to alternatives like curbside voting; reconsidering the number and location of polling places; sanitizing polling places and enforcing social distancing; and recruiting more poll workers.
- **Communicate proactively and transparently with voters.** This includes publicizing (and explaining) any changes to election rules or processes early and often; making information available in multiple languages and on multiple platforms; and preparing the public for likely delays in reporting election results.

Many states have begun to implement these measures, or already have robust voting options in place. Others have limited absentee ballot access and will require significant changes — legislative or otherwise — to expand access to vote-by-mail options. Investments will be needed to make in-person voting safer in time for the general election. Systems that have been adopted for the primary season will need to be extended, and in many cases expanded, to the general election.



NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON ELECTION CRISES

To implement the Task Force's recommendations, planning must begin now. For scaling up vote-by-mail, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group projects dozens of steps that must be completed between April 1 and Election Day. This includes a three-part process of creating applications for absentee ballots, sending ballots to voters, and processing completed ballots.⁷ Safe early voting and in-person voting will similarly require advance planning to recruit poll workers who are less vulnerable to the virus, prepare for sanitizing polling places, and enforce social distancing, among other implementation hurdles. The timeline for these measures is tight; that work must start today.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-chicago-poll-worker-dies-covid-cornavirus-20200413-rz55vqpo6jfbxn7e4i6vkj6n2y-story.html>.⁶ Darrel Rowland, *Biden Wins Big in Ohio, but Voting Difficulties Amid*

Coronavirus Is Big Story, Columbus Dispatch (Apr. 28, 2020),

<https://www.dispatch.com/news/20200428/biden-wins-big-in-ohio-but-voting-difficulties-amid-coronavirus-is-big-story>.⁷ Election Assistance Commission, *Vote By Mail Project Timeline*, <https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/vbm/VBMProjectTimeline.pdf> (last visited Apr. 24, 2020).

2

Instituting wide-scale voting by mail and safe in-person voting in time for November will be costly and require significant resources from the federal government. The CARES Act has allocated \$400 million of much needed election assistance for states, but additional funds are needed. States must demand additional funds from Congress to cover the high cost of conducting the general election during a public health crisis.

A shift to wide-scale voting by mail and safer in-person voting will require herculean coordination efforts among federal, state, and local officials. Please let us know if the Task Force, or an individual member of the Task Force, can be helpful as you make these changes. With advance planning and additional funding, it is possible to ensure a free and fair election despite the unprecedented challenges we now face as a country. Our democracy depends on it.

Sincerely

,

The National Task Force on Election
Crises



NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON ELECTION CRISES