

May 14, 2020

Re: ACLU Urges Cosponsorship of the VoteSafe Act, H.R. 6807

Dear Representative:

The American Civil Liberties Union strongly urges you to cosponsor H.R. 6807, the VoteSafe Act, introduced by Congressman James Clyburn as a bill that safeguards Americans' ability to vote during the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge Congress either to pass it as a freestanding bill, or include it in a relief package.



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The bill sets reasonable, uniform national standards for the 2020 general election for all registered voters to use mail-in absentee voting, a minimum early in-person voting period of 20 days, and provides \$2.5 billion in funding to support states in these efforts. The bill also provides an additional \$2.5 billion in grant incentives for states to increase the safety and availability of in-person voting and to meet the needs of voters who will face the greatest impediments to casting their ballots safely and reliably during the pandemic, including voters with disabilities, African American voters, language minority voters, and Native American, Alaska Native, and rural voters.

As we have seen in postponed or chaotic primaries in Ohio, Florida, Texas, and Wisconsin, states and counties are currently unprepared to address the seismic shift in election administration necessary to ensure the 2020 elections can proceed safely during the pandemic, without diminishing the fundamental right to vote. Turnout numbers from Milwaukee alone show a massive drop in turnout, from [over 167,000](#)¹ in 2016 to just over [95,000](#)² this year. The images of voters waiting in rain and hail in the midst of the current public health crisis and reports of absentee voters who did not receive their ballots in time are antithetical to American democratic values. People were disenfranchised en masse.

Baseline federal standards are necessary to ensure Americans are not forced into unsafe conditions to exercise their fundamental right to vote. These baseline rules must include, at a minimum, the universal option to vote absentee by mail and expanded early in-person voting to create safer voting conditions. Without federal leadership, the pandemic poses an existential threat to our democratic process—

¹ Nathaniel Rakich, Twitter, Apr. 8, 2020, <https://twitter.com/baseballot/status/1247745529364099075?s=20>.

² City of Milwaukee Election Commission, April 7, 2020 - Spring Election: Final Official Results including provisional ballots, <https://city.milwaukee.gov/ElectionResults1717.htm#.Xr2JHGhKhPZ>.

Wisconsin may be a preview of the conditions that await voters who will cast their ballots in the remaining primaries and November general election. Recent polling makes clear that most Americans broadly support the availability of both no-excuse absentee voting by mail and expanded in-person voting options during the pandemic regardless of party affiliation.³

The VoteSafe Act is a reasonable, balanced approach that—in addition to providing minimum uniform federal standards to ensure people can vote safely during the pandemic—also gives states the flexibility to address the needs of their voting population by providing substantial funding, available to the states if they choose, to improve voting processes and technologies, upgrade voter registration options, and mitigate the distinct burdens faced by groups that will likely have to overcome the greatest impediments to being able to vote safely.

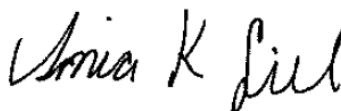
It is critical that Congress provides the electoral framework and funding necessary for state officials to address the unprecedented challenges facing voters, poll workers, and election administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The VoteSafe Act would ensure that Americans can participate in our democracy on a full and equal basis at the ballot box, without having to choose between casting their ballots and protecting their health.

Please contact Ashleigh Wilson at ashleigh.wilson@mail.house.gov to cosponsor H.R. 6807. If you have any questions about the ACLU's endorsement of the VoteSafe Act, please contact me at sgill@aclu.org.

Sincerely,



Ronald Newman
National Political Director
National Political Advocacy Department



Sonia Gill
Senior Legislative Counsel
National Political Advocacy Department

³ Chris Kahn, *Most Americans, Unlike Trump, Want Mail-In Ballots for November if Coronavirus Threatens: Reuters/Ipsos Poll*, REUTERS (Apr. 7, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-poll/most-americans-unlike-trump-want-mail-in-ballots-for-november-if-coronavirus-threatens-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKBN21P3G0>.