



Duckworth and Durbin Join Klobuchar, Murray and Colleagues in Urging Administration to Keep Voters and Election Officials Safe Amid Coronavirus Pandem

May 14 2020 5:00 PM

WASHINGTON, DC] — U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration with jurisdiction over federal elections, and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), and 23 colleagues in a letter to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calling on the Administration to issue updated and comprehensive guidance on safety measures to keep voters, poll workers, and election workers safe during upcoming elections, both for mail voting and in-person voting. Reports indicate that health officials have now linked over 50 cases of COVID-19 to Wisconsin voters who showed up to the polls on Election Day as well as poll workers.

“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,” the Senators wrote.

They continued: **“Republican and Democratic election officials across the country have been clear that this pandemic is affecting their ability to safely administer elections. 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.”

In addition to Duckworth, Durbin, Klobuchar and Murray, the letter was signed by Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chris Coons (D-DE), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Doug Jones (D-AL), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Ed Markey (D-MA), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Tina Smith (D-MN), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Tom Udall (D-NM), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Mark Warner (D-VA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

In March, Duckworth and Durbin joined Klobuchar, Murray and others, in introducing the [*Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020*](#) which now has 35 co-sponsors, to expand early in-person voting and no-excuse absentee vote-by-mail to all states and provide states the funding and resources to improve the safety of elections during the coronavirus pandemic.

Full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below:

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. 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. 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.

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.

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. 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,