

July 20, 2020

Dear Senator,

The undersigned 32 national faith-based organizations and congregations, as part of the Faithful Democracy coalition, urge the Senate to provide sufficient funding in the next COVID-19 package to safeguard two foundational aspects of our democracy: the general election in November and the decennial Census count. Representing a diversity of faith traditions, we all agree that a faithful democracy means safe, fair elections and an accurate count of the population to determine political representation over the next decade.

Over 130,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 and cases are surging across the country. Responding to the pandemic and preventing further risk of life should be the Senate's top priority. With less than four months until the November election and with Census operations in full swing Congressional action to safeguard these pillars of our democracy and minimize the spread of COVID 19 is of utmost urgency. We need the Senate to act now for the resources to ensure that voters have reasonable options to cast their ballots and Census enumerators will be able to safely capture a full and accurate count.

Emergency Election Funding:

On June 22nd, the CDC issued updated guidance on elections and polling places in COVID-19. The guidance outlines that election polling settings should implement a wide variety of voting options, longer voting periods (more days and/or more hours), and a menu of options for reducing the number of voters who congregate indoors. People of color are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 as well as by barriers to the ballot box. We are called to adjust our elections accordingly to make the electoral process accessible to voters while minimizing their risk of exposure to a deadly virus. However, it costs money to ensure open access and maintain the integrity of the voting process without raising unnecessary barriers for voters.

States and local jurisdictions desperately need \$3.6 billion in federal assistance to expand mail-in voting, make polling places safe for in-person voting, and increase online voter registration. Administering an election with unprecedented voter turnout in the midst of a pandemic adds layers of logistical challenges for state and local officials. Adapting and planning for changed operations, contingencies, public education and new equipment means unanticipated costs that should be covered by federal emergency funding. This funding would help meet nearly universal challenges like hiring lower risk poll workers, ensuring safe social distancing at the polls, and meeting a surge in demand for absentee voting. Time is running out. Machines to validate, open and scan the higher volume of absentee ballots need to be purchased immediately to have them available and ready to use in local jurisdictions before the election.

Supplemental Funding for Census Operations:

Faith communities are committed to getting out the count among historically undercounted and hard-to-count communities. We urge Congress to do its part by providing emergency resources in the next COVID-19 response package. Specifically, **we urge passage of \$400 million in additional funding to ensure a successful enumeration in the face of unprecedented disruptions to 2020 Census operations.**

Additional funds are needed to enhance census operations designed to capture historically undercounted population groups. In light of disruptions from COVID-19, successful enumeration of households and of “special populations” will require additional staffing, outreach and advertising, and mailings beyond what the Census Bureau currently has planned.

This Census 2020 contingency fund must also be replenished to contend with possible events that further complicate operations. To date, the Census has already committed three-quarters of the existing contingency fund to adapt operations to the pandemic. Further increases in COVID-19 cases and other disruptions to field operations are real prospects at the height of hurricane season. The Census needs a robust contingency plan in place with adequate funding.

The November general election and the decennial Census Count are foundational building blocks of our democracy. As people of faith, we believe our democracy upholds the dignity of each person by recognizing their right to vote and to be counted. But our public servants that administer elections and manage Census operations are in desperate need of federal support during this pandemic. **The Senate must address both of these problems in the upcoming COVID-19 response package by including \$3.6 billion for safe, fair elections and \$400 million for a safe, complete Census count.**

Grounded in our faith traditions we strive for policies reflecting the values we hold: protect the vulnerable, care for life and respect the dignity of each person. The faith community urges you to prioritize these emergency funding needs, thus protecting the foundation of our democratic systems and the health of voters and election workers.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists
American Friends Service Committee
Church World Service
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Faith in Public Life
Faithful America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Islamic Relief USA

Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Lake Oconee Community Church
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Missionary Oblates/OIP Trust
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pax Christi USA
Poligon Education Fund
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness
Reclaim Our Democracy
Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Mercy Justice Team
The Episcopal Church
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries