



PROTECTING ELECTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP:

HOW LOCAL ELECTEDS CAN MAKE IT EASIER AND SAFER TO VOTE DURING COVID-19



JUNE 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the cornerstone of our democracy—the right to vote. Just like with our healthcare system and our economy, public officials at all levels of government need to act quickly to provide resources and policy responses to protect the vote of every eligible American.

We have already seen what the future may hold if we do not act. In April 2020, Wisconsin voters stood in line for hours during a pandemic to exercise their fundamental right to vote, forced to risk their health to participate in our democracy.¹ This burden was not shared equally. Wards in Milwaukee with higher Black and Latinx² populations had longer lines and significantly lower voter turnout compared to wards with high percentages of white residents.³ In fact, the average voter turnout in Black and Latinx wards was 30 percentage points lower than that of predominantly white ones.⁴ In June, these inequities were repeated in Georgia, where pandemic conditions were compounded by intentional voter suppression efforts led by Governor Brian Kemp.⁵ Fears of COVID-19 reduced the number of election workers willing to operate the polls, leading to significant reductions in places where people could cast a ballot.⁶ Some people waited seven hours to vote.⁷ Once again, predominantly Black counties disproportionately bore the burden on their right to vote.⁸

No voter should have to choose between their health during a pandemic and exercising the right to vote. We must act now to defend the well-being of voters and communities while ensuring that every eligible voter can safely cast a ballot in November. However, ensuring that the 2020 election runs smoothly and safely during the pandemic will require adjusting, adapting, and rethinking our election infrastructure. We need to be ready for an election held during a pandemic where social distancing and quarantines upend in-person election administration as well as our strategies of voter engagement and

¹ Shruti Banerjee & Dr. Megan Gall, “COVID-19 Silenced Voters of Color in Wisconsin,” Demos & All Voting is Local, May 14, 2020, www.demos.org/blog/covid-19-silenced-voters-color-wisconsin.

² This toolbox substitutes “Latinx” for the Census category, “Hispanic (of any race).”

³ Banerjee & Gall, *supra* note 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ William Barber & Tom Steyer, “Republican Vote Suppression is a 2020 Scandal. Georgia’s Primary Proved It,” NBC News, June 17, 2020, www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/republican-vote-suppression-2020-scandal-georgia-s-primary-proved-it-ncna1231217.

⁶ Richard Fausset, Reid J. Epstein and Rick Rojas, “‘I Refuse Not to Be Heard’: Georgia in Uproar Over Voting Meltdown,” New York Times, June 9, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/us/politics/atlanta-voting-georgia-primary.html.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

voter turnout. That is why people, communities, and local elected leaders across the country are taking action to ensure our democracy will remain strong no matter what the COVID-19 situation is this fall. We are reimagining ways to register voters, expand voting from home via mail-in ballots, and provide well-staffed in-person voting options that are safe for both voters and election workers this November.

While Americans care deeply about the right to vote, with everything happening in our world right now, most are not focused on the pandemic's impact on our elections. People may think of voting rights and election administration as problems for federal decision makers, state lawmakers, or the courts to solve. **But that is only half the story: it is on all of us to protect and ensure the right of every eligible American to vote. There are a number of big structural solutions that local elected leaders can enact in our communities to repair our democracy today.** We do not need to wait for new leadership in Washington, D.C. or the state capitol. We can strengthen democracy right now by changing the laws in the cities, counties, and school districts where we live, work, and study.

In fact, in this crisis we have often seen that it is local electeds who often lead the way on making sure everyone can safely cast a ballot—and who sometimes bring their states along with them. After the disastrous April primary in Wisconsin, Local Progress members and allies on the Milwaukee City Council passed the “SafeVote” program to send 300,000 registered voters mail-in ballot applications. Soon after, the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC), made up of six appointees split between the major parties, unanimously agreed to send mail-in ballot applications to all registered voters in the state.⁹ The unanimous bipartisan move was a surprise to some, since the week before, the same vote failed along party lines and a prominent state Republican—Scott Fitzgerald, the Wisconsin Senate's majority leader—had spoken out against vote-by-mail.¹⁰ It is possible WEC officials felt the pressure to act after realizing Wisconsin cities, including Milwaukee and Racine, were making plans to expand mail-in-voting with or without them.¹¹

⁹ Adam Levy and Chandelis Duster, “Wisconsin Approves Measure to Send Absentee Ballot Applications to Voters,” CNN, May, 28, 2020, www.cnn.com/2020/05/28/politics/wisconsin-absentee-voting-applications/index.html.

¹⁰ Scott Bauer, “Wisconsin agrees to broad mailing of absentee applications,” Associated Press, May 27, 2020, apnews.com/e738275687445170edf4a1fb54b3d6f0.

¹¹ Christina Liefing, “Racine Council Advances Plan to Mail Absentee Voting Applications to All City Voters,” Journal Times, May 6, 2020, journaltimes.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/elections/racine-council-advances-plan-to-mail-absentee-voting-applications-to-all-city-voters/article_b3610027-956f-509d-a2d0-672d5c061ed8.html.

Local officials are closest to the actual administration of elections, and in some states, they can make significant election policy decisions, in addition to the implementation tools at their disposal. To that end, we have created the following toolbox of high priority COVID-19 era local reforms to protect our democracy during the pandemic. While anyone can use this toolbox, we designed it for local elected leaders—people like our Local Progress school board members, city councilors, mayors, county administrators, and their staff. Our hope is that local leaders committed to expanding and repairing our democracy will be able to use this as a resource to do the work that needs to be done.

Each section has three main parts. First is an overview of the challenge that COVID-19 poses to specific aspects of our democracy this year. Second is a policy overview explaining the local reform, its value to safe and inclusive elections, examples from localities that have implemented the idea, and key considerations. Finally, we provide sample policy language—usually real local ordinances and resolutions pulled from communities around the country who have already undertaken these reforms.¹² **If you are a local elected leader interested in passing any of these reforms, and you need support, please reach out. We would be more than happy to be a resource wherever we can.**¹³

¹² Please note, these are NOT model resolutions or ordinances that can just be introduced and passed without doing further research—these are simply examples that can be used as a jumping off point. In many cases, we did not include the full resolution or ordinance to save space, and key provisions may be missing. Further research needed includes seeing what limitations, if any, are placed on localities by your state.

¹³ If you are interested in learning more, please contact Matt Duffy (mduffy@populardemocracy.org).

WHERE EVERY LOCAL ELECTED LEADER CAN START: ENGAGE ELECTION ADMINISTRATORS

We wrote this toolbox to be a resource for all local elected leaders. We recognize some electeds may be in states where certain reforms are preempted, while others may be the lone voice fighting for voting rights on their city council or school board—but every local elected leader has the power to do something. **A great place to start doing this work is by being an advocate for your community with state and local election administrators.**

Local election administrators are the people who run the day to day election operations—receiving voter applications, recruiting and training poll workers, and reporting election results.¹⁴ They might be single individuals who are elected or appointed, an administrative body like an Elections Board, or some combination of the two.¹⁵ The office may be explicitly focused on elections—like a Board of Registrars of Voters or a Supervisor of Elections—or might administer elections along with other duties—like a City/County Clerk, Tax Assessor, or Recorder.¹⁶

Whoever oversees elections this year in your community, they need to hear from you. There is no one better positioned than local elected leaders to be the bridge between these administrators and the people—lifting up community concerns and advocating for changes to keep voters from having to choose between their health and their vote this November. A few ways you can engage with local election administrators before November are:

- **Ask them to provide your office with a written plan for how they are planning on dealing with the pandemic**
- **Hold a “town-hall” meeting with local election administrators and community members**
- **Call local or state decision makers directly to raise community concerns**
- **Write an op-ed in the local paper**
- **Get similarly minded elected officials on board and write a sign-on letter**

¹⁴ "Election Administration at State and Local Levels," National Conference of State Legislatures, February 3, 2020, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/election-administration-at-state-and-local-levels.aspx.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO REGISTER TO VOTE

The Challenge

Every presidential election year there is a surge in newly registered voters, as student groups, base building organizations, nonprofits, and government agencies bring new voters excited by the presidential race into our system.¹⁷ These new voters are often registered by teams of canvassers who go door-to-door, meet people outside grocery stores, table at naturalization ceremonies, or catch students as they head to class. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed that landscape. Many of these field registration programs may be impossible due to social distancing and state restrictions on gathering in public. As of this writing, voter registration is significantly lower than expected.¹⁸ Without reforms, many new voters who would have registered through those field programs during a normal year may not have the opportunity to register in time to vote in November.

The voter registration restrictions and challenges created by COVID-19 exacerbate existing inequities and barriers to participating in our democracy. It is estimated that 74 million Americans, or up to 32 percent of the eligible population, were not registered to vote in the 2018 general election.¹⁹ And the likelihood of being unregistered was higher among people of color and young people, even before the pandemic arrived: 46 percent of eligible Latinxs, 47 percent of eligible Asian Americans, 35 percent of eligible Black Americans, and 51 percent of eligible young people (aged 18 to 24) were not registered to vote in 2018.²⁰ Registration rates for families with annual incomes below \$30,000 and naturalized citizens are also disproportionately low.²¹

¹⁷ See, e.g., Graham Moomaw, "Virginia Sees New Voter Registrations Plummet in April," *Virginia Mercury*, May 14, 2020, www.virginiamercury.com/2020/05/14/virginia-sees-new-voter-registrations-plummet-in-april/; Philip Bump, "People are Searching for Voter Registration Info at Presidential-Year Levels," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/10/17/people-are-searching-voter-registration-info-presidential-year-levels/.

¹⁸ Kaleigh Rogers & Nathaniel Rakich, "Voter Registrations Are Way, Way Down During the Pandemic," *FiveThirtyEight*, June 26, 2020, www.fivethirtyeight.com/features/voter-registrations-are-way-way-down-during-the-pandemic/.

¹⁹ These registration estimates are based on the November 2016 and April 2019 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, a sample survey on voting and registration participation fielded every two years by the U.S. Census Bureau. To calculate the unregistered population, CPD subtracted the estimated percentage of respondents who self-reported being registered from the total citizen voting age population. The unregistered population estimate includes those who self-reported in the Voting and Registration Supplement as being unregistered, as well as non-respondents. See, "Voting and Registration in the Election of 2016," Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html; "Voting and Registration in the Election of 2018," Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-583.html.

²⁰ "Voting and Registration in the Election of 2018," Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-583.html.

²¹ *Ibid.*

With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting election administration this year, being on the voting rolls well in advance of the election is more important than ever. Many of the reforms being enacted to protect our elections during COVID-19 rely on registered voter lists. For example, many jurisdictions sending out vote-by-mail applications are sending them only to registered voters. Voters who are not already registered to vote will miss out on one of the easiest ways to obtain a mail-in ballot. If voters are not registered as early as possible, we risk replicating the existing disparities in voter registration through vote-by-mail and other well-intentioned reforms.

Solution: Expand Ways to Register to Vote Online

To increase access to safe voting options and encourage voter turnout, cities and counties (in states that allow it) should make it easier to register online, including local agencies.

Luckily, forty states allow online voter registration for the 2020 general election.²² In most of these states, cities, counties, and school districts can begin connecting the online voter registration system to their online platforms. School districts can make it so when eligible high school students register for classes, they are automatically connected to the state's online voter registration system. For cities and counties, when people interact with local government online—to reserve public space, pay municipal water bills, make an appointment with a city agency, or simply go to the city website—they can also be encouraged to register to vote.

National Voter Registration Act data shows that people with low incomes and people of color are more likely to register to vote at public assistance offices than white people, with Black and Latinx people three and four times more likely to register to vote at state public agencies than white people, respectively.²³ Furthermore, local agencies already have the infrastructure to provide support for eligible residents navigating the voter registration process. Cities, counties, and school boards with more capacity can work with local election authorities to track how many people are registering and adjust their website to reach more registrants. All local officials should also try to work with nonprofits, community organizations, and residents to figure out how to better encourage people to register to vote online.

²² "Online Voter Registration," National Conference of State Legislatures, February 3, 2020, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx.

²³ "Increasing Compliance with Section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act," U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, www.usccr.gov/pubs/docs/NVRA-09-07-16.pdf.

If you are in a state without online voter registration, or with a more limited voter registration system, there still may be a workaround to enable voters to register online. In many states, nonprofits, community organizations, and city governments can register people to vote. In these states, cities and counties may be able to provide an online portal where residents can enter the same information that they would provide on a paper voter registration form, including a digital or electronic signature, a copy of their identification, or whatever else is needed. The local agency then takes that information, prints it onto a paper voter registration application, and mails it to the appropriate state or local election agency. This way a city can create what is effectively an online voter registration system, even if the state has not developed one yet.²⁴

Examples

For states with online voter registration: Countless cities, counties, and school districts have links to register to vote somewhere on their website. At the time of writing, very few have such links prominently displayed, but it is encouraging to see entities like the Metropolitan State University of Denver making voter registration part of its menu when students visit the registrar's office webpage.²⁵ Such actions could drastically increase voter registration and help counter the likely drop in registrations if canvassers cannot register people in person. If you are a local elected leader who has added voter registration links prominently to your city website, please reach out so that we can lift up your work.

For states without, or with limited, online voter registration: New York State has an online voter registration system, but New York residents can register to vote online only with a DMV-issued ID, which must be obtained in person.²⁶ This is a serious burden for many younger New York City voters who travel via mass transit and have never needed a city ID.²⁷ This is especially true now that an in-person trip to the DMV may not be possible for some time. To allow residents who do not want to first obtain a driver's license or a state ID the opportunity to register to vote online, **New York City** passed Local Law

²⁴ Even this workaround may or may not be allowed under state law. Be sure to consult with an attorney or expert on how your state construes their election laws in this area.

²⁵ Office of the Registrar, Metropolitan State University of Denver, www.msudenver.edu/registrar/voterregistration/

²⁶ "Register to Vote Online," New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, <https://dmv.ny.gov/more-info/electronic-voter-registration-application>.

²⁷ Samar Khurshid, "Push for Online Voter Registration Bill as Coronavirus Prevents Registration Drives," Gotham Gazette, March 31, 2020, www.gothamgazette.com/state/9260-push-online-voter-registration-coronavirus-prevents-registration-drives-voting.

238 in 2017.²⁸ The law allowed the City Campaign Finance Board (a local agency) to create a website where registrants could enter the same information they would normally have entered on a paper registration form. The Campaign Finance Board would then take that information, put it on a paper application form, and send it to the Board of Elections.

Key Considerations

For states with online voter registration: When placing links on local government websites, consider the pages and services users are most likely to visit online, and try to place online voter registration links there. It may be particularly helpful to include voter registration information and links to register anywhere users already have to submit information—for example, paying a water bill, or reserving space at a park. Additionally, set up a schedule to regularly check the link from your website, to ensure you are still linking to the most up to date voter registration page.

For states without, or with limited, online voter registration: Local elected leaders should work with local election administrators to be sure they are reading the law in the same way. When New York City passed Local Law 238, state law only required an “original” signature to register to vote. However, after the law passed, the City Board of Elections released their interpretation of the law, arguing that “original” should be understood as “handwritten” despite no such specifications in the text of the law. The legal debate continues today, and the law has yet to be implemented, even as the need for it has dramatically increased due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

Additional considerations relate to implementation. Agency staff may be hesitant to adapt to the changes, often because they have never been asked to register voters before, do not fully understand their new responsibilities, or both. For these laws to be successful, cities and counties must also establish clear guidelines, quickly train staff on their new roles, and conduct outreach campaigns that promote the opportunity to register online among potential voters.

²⁸ Local Law 238 of 2017, The City of New York, legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1946650&GUID=6045AF54-D2A4-4432-8561-8657E969D5F5.

Sample Policy Language (For States with Online Voter Registration): A RESOLUTION to update the [JURISDICTION] website to provide residents more opportunities to register to vote.

WHEREAS, the [GOVERNING BODY] seeks to support the ability of every eligible resident to exercise their fundamental right to vote; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has made voter registration more difficult for voters,

WHEREAS, [STATE] provides a means for voters to register online via [STATE ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION PORTAL];

WHEREAS, the [JURISDICTION] regularly interacts with residents via [JURISDICTION]'s website and online service offerings;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, [JURISDICTION] will update the [JURISDICTION] website with prominently displayed links to [STATE ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION PORTAL] in the places where residents are most likely to interact with [JURISDICTION]'s website, including the homepage, most visited pages, and any pages where residents receive public services; this includes, but may not be limited to, pages where residents provide information, pay bills, or reserve public space.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that these changes to [JURISDICTION] website will be made within three weeks of the enactment of this resolution.

[Adapted from New York City's Local Law 238²⁹]

WHEREAS, the [GOVERNING BODY] seeks to support the ability of every eligible resident to exercise their fundamental right to vote; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has made voter registration more difficult for voters,

WHEREAS, residents would benefit from additional voter registration opportunities offered online, so that they may safely register while still social distancing,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the [LOCAL GOVERNING BODY] that [RELEVANT SECTION OF LOCAL CODE] be repealed, reenacted, and amended to read:

SECTION I: ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION

- a) The [LOCAL AGENCY] shall provide a secure website and mobile application that allows any individual qualified to vote in [JURISDICTION] to confidentially submit to such agency through such website and mobile application the information collected on a voter registration application form pursuant to [STATE] election law for the purpose of registering to vote or updating such individual's voter registration.
- b) Such website and mobile application shall allow such individuals to electronically provide a signature of a quality and likeness comparable to a signature written with ink, consistent with subdivision c of this section. The website and mobile application shall also allow such individuals to view the notices contained on or accompanying a printed voter registration application form.
- c) Upon receipt of such information and signature, the agency shall print such information onto a voter registration application form, electronically affix such signature, and transmit such printed application to the [STATE/LOCAL ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR].
- d) Such website and mobile application shall also conspicuously set forth information concerning the timeframes and deadlines for applying to register to vote or updating registration, to assist such individuals in ascertaining whether the registration or update will take effect for the next election.

²⁹ Local Law 238 of 2017, The City of New York, legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1946650&GUID=6045AF54-D2A4-4432-8561-8657E969D5F5.

Such website and mobile application shall also conspicuously set forth information concerning how a voter may confirm their registration information.

- e) The [LOCAL AGENCY] shall transmit voter registration application forms completed pursuant to this section to the [STATE/LOCAL ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR] within two weeks of receipt of complete information [. . .] provided that if such information is received within two weeks before the last day for registration to vote in a citywide election, such completed forms shall be transmitted as soon as is practicable to the [STATE/LOCAL ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR] and if such information is received within five days before the last day for registration to vote in a citywide election, such completed forms shall be transmitted to the [STATE/LOCAL ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR] no later than five days after the date of acceptance.

MAKE IT EASIER TO VOTE FROM HOME

The Challenge

One of the biggest challenges to our elections this year is safe voter access to the ballots. Widespread vote-by-mail (or vote-at-home) is the most effective strategy we have for ensuring that Americans can vote and stay safe, because it will keep them physically apart during the pandemic. In addition to being a safe way to cast ballots during social distancing or quarantine conditions, more people voting at home also helps to reduce dangerous crowding at in-person polling places, which must remain an option for individuals who need assistance or wish to vote in person for another reason. Having fewer people at the polls also creates a safer environment for election workers, who tend to be older and at higher risk of COVID-19 complications.

Solution: Send Every Voter a Mail-In Ballot Application

To increase access to a safe voting option and encourage voter turnout, cities and counties should send every voter a mail-in ballot application.

In many states without universal vote-by-mail (a system in which ballots are sent automatically to voters), the option for no-excuse absentee voting exists, and some states with excuse-based absentee voting are clarifying their rules to include health concerns related to COVID-19.³⁰ Thus, most states currently allow all voters to vote at home, but voters who wish to do so will still need to request a mail-in ballot.³¹ This is where cities and counties can play an important role in informing voters and making the mail-in ballot request process easier.

Before the pandemic, mail-in ballots were already an important option for alleviating common challenges related to in-person voting, including long lines, inadequate accessibility for people with disabilities, voter intimidation, and polling place closures or consolidation (a growing practice in

³⁰ J. Edward Moreno, "Here's Where Your State Stands on Mail-In Voting," The Hill, June 9, 2020, www.thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/501577-heres-where-your-state-stands-on-mail-in-voting. Rules around vote-by-mail are still changing. See, e.g., "COVID-19 and Elections," National Conference of State Legislatures, June 24, 2020, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/state-action-on-covid-19-and-elections.aspx. Please be sure to do your own research to determine what your state's laws currently are.

³¹ "Preparing Your State for an Election Under Pandemic Conditions," Brennan Center for Justice, May 29, 2020, www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/preparing-your-state-election-under-pandemic-conditions.

communities of color after the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013).³² This year, with COVID-19, voting in person poses a potential health risk to voters and election workers, so making it possible and more accessible for voters to successfully use mail-in ballots is more important than ever.

It is extremely important to understand that, in most cases, mail-in ballots do not necessarily need to be submitted via the mail. Most states allow mail-in ballots to be turned in at physical polling places on Election Day, at early voting sites, or via drop-boxes—“secure, locked structure[s] operated by election officials where voters may deliver their ballots”³³—which are distributed throughout the jurisdiction.³⁴ A more appropriate term might be a “vote-at-home” ballot—the key innovation, and what keeps voters safe during a pandemic, is that voters can fill out their ballots in the comfort of their own homes without breaking social distancing protocols.³⁵

Cities and counties can increase the chance voters who want to vote via mail-in ballot receive their ballots in time by sending out mail-in ballot applications to all eligible voters as early as possible.³⁶ Applications should be mailed early so voters can submit their requests, election officials can process the requests, and voters can receive their ballots with sufficient time to return them. Minimizing the last-minute crunch of applications near a deadline is key to effectively administering this voting option. Vote-by-mail applications should include return envelopes with pre-paid return postage and place no additional burdens related to identification, witnesses, or notarization.³⁷ Also, for a faster or additional option for returning the ballot application, election officials should allow voters to email and fax applications back. Finally, in addition to mailing the ballot application, additional methods for requesting a ballot can be helpful, including an online application (particularly when integrated with voter registration and ballot tracking) and a phone option, with accessibility considerations for languages and disabilities.

³² Matt Cohen, “Report: More than 1600 Polling Places Have Closed Since the Supreme Court Gutted the Voting Rights Act,” Mother Jones, September 10, 2019, www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/09/report-more-than-1600-polling-places-have-closed-since-the-supreme-court-gutted-the-voting-rights-act/.

³³ “Voting By Mail / Absentee Voting,” U.S. Election Assistance Commission, www.eac.gov/election-officials/voting-by-mail-absentee-voting. States vary on how much flexibility there is around choosing drop-box locations. Check state law before seeking to expand use of drop-boxes.

³⁴ “Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options,” National Conference of State Legislatures, June 9, 2020, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx.

³⁵ This toolbox chooses to refer to this reform as “voting at home via a mail-in ballot” to match how the reform is most commonly referred to in the U.S. right now (i.e., “vote-by-mail”).

³⁶ Eligible voters will depend on state law. We recommend including all active and inactive registered voters, since signing up for a mail-in ballot is a way to return to active voter status.

³⁷ Some of these requirements may already be established by state law.

Throughout this process, it is important to provide clear and consistent information on paper and online about the options available, the steps involved, and the value of the vote-at-home option.

For voting at home to work for more people, electeds should make sure there are sufficient alternatives for returning ballots besides by mail.³⁸ Drop-boxes are an especially effective return option.³⁹ They are inexpensive to set up, and many of them can be distributed over a wide geographic area to ensure that no one has to travel far to reach one. They are particularly important for rural areas, such as Native American tribal lands, where postal service is spotty and the nearest in-person polling place may be far away. One consideration when placing drop-boxes is to avoid placing them inside buildings that may be closed when voters want to use them.

In many places, mail-in ballots have the potential to make elections more accessible for years after the 2020 elections. In some states, voters who request a mail-in ballot can be added to a permanent vote-by-mail list.⁴⁰ Voters on that list automatically receive absentee ballots for all future elections. Studies have demonstrated increased turnout among voters on permanent vote-by-mail lists.⁴¹ Elections which typically have the lowest turnout (local and state elections, off-year elections, and special elections) see the biggest increases as a result of this policy.⁴² Low-income voters, voters with disabilities, young voters, and voters of color have also been shown to benefit the most from this policy.⁴³

When done well, mail-in ballots are supplemental to in-person voting, meaning voters have the opportunity to vote either with their mail-in ballot or in person. This way, people can vote in the way that works best for them. Cities and counties should be wary of using vote-by-mail as a replacement for in-person voting, which can disenfranchise voters who might struggle with mail-in ballots (e.g., voters with vision impairment, voters without reliable access to the postal system, etc.). The importance of

³⁸ This is particularly true this year with the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the postal service, which is currently facing a major financial crisis. Providing other options to turn in mail-in ballots may alleviate some of the strain on the post office this November. See, Brian Naylor, "As More Americans Prepare To Vote By Mail, Postal Service Faces Big Challenges," NPR, May 30, 2020, www.npr.org/2020/05/30/865258362/as-more-americans-prepare-to-vote-by-mail-postal-service-faces-big-challenges.

³⁹ "Voting By Mail / Absentee Voting," U.S. Election Assistance Commission, www.eac.gov/election-officials/voting-by-mail-absentee-voting. States vary on how much flexibility there is around choosing drop-box locations. Check state law before seeking to expand use of drop-boxes.

⁴⁰ "VOPP: Table 4: State Laws on Removing Voters From Permanent Absentee Lists," National Conference of State Legislatures, April 20, 2020, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-4-state-laws-on-removing-voters-from-permanent-absentee-lists.aspx ["Five states (Arizona, California, Minnesota, Montana and New Jersey) and the District of Columbia"].

⁴¹ Alan S. Gerber, Gregory A. Huber, and Seth J. Hill, "Identifying the Effect of All-Mail Elections on Turnout: Staggered Reform in the Evergreen State," *Political Science Research and Methods* 1(1): 1-116, 2013, [dx.doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2013.5](https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2013.5).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

maintaining in-person voting options and planning for accessibility across needs is even greater during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people may be experiencing greater uncertainty in their daily lives.

Examples

Currently, five states already automatically mail out ballots for their elections:⁴⁴ **Oregon** blazed the trail in 2000, then came **Washington** (2011), **Colorado** (2013) and **Hawaii** (2019)—**Utah** joined this list recently after all 29 counties opted into the law passed in 2012.⁴⁵ In June, **California** passed a law to mail a ballot to every active voter for the November election, mirroring Governor Newsom’s executive order from a month earlier.⁴⁶ In other states, there is a mix of vote-by-mail policy and implementation decisions left up to local officials.

In response to COVID-19, city and county officials across the country who are not legally able to send mail-in ballots without first receiving a voter request have instead decided to send out mail-in ballot applications to voters.⁴⁷ In Wisconsin, the decision by **Milwaukee** and a few cities to mail ballot applications seemed to push the state’s elections commission to make this a statewide policy.⁴⁸ The two small suburbs outside Milwaukee that acted early and sent out ballot applications for the April 7 primary saw a near doubling of the voters casting mail-in ballots (about 60 percent of voters in both cities).⁴⁹ After Milwaukee adopted this policy and more cities began considering the same, state officials on the bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission, both Republican and Democratic commissioners, voted unanimously to mail out ballot applications to all voters registered in Wisconsin. In Pennsylvania, where no excuse mail-in voting is being implemented for the first time this year, **Allegheny County** has chosen

⁴⁴ “All-Mail Elections (aka Vote-By-Mail),” National Conference of State Legislatures, October 24, 2019, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/all-mail-elections.aspx.

⁴⁵ Wendy Underhill, “How Vote-From-Home Works in Utah,” National Conference of State Legislatures, April 15, 2020, www.ncsl.org/blog/2020/04/15/how-vote-from-home-works-in-utah.aspx.

⁴⁶ Jeremy B. White, “California enacts November mail-ballot law — with surprising GOP support,” Politico, June 18, 2020, www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/18/california-lawmakers-pass-november-mail-ballot-bill-with-surprising-gop-support-1293679.

⁴⁷ Rachel M. Cohen, “As Democrats Push Vote-By-Mail Measures, Local Governments Are Leading The Charge on Safe Voting,” The Intercept, April 20, 2020, theintercept.com/2020/04/20/vote-by-mail-wisconsin-pennsylvania-elections/.

⁴⁸ Patrick Marley, “Wisconsin election officials agree to mail absentee ballot request forms to most voters,” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, May 27, 2020, www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2020/05/27/wisconsin-officials-take-up-mailing-absentee-ballot-request-forms/5262753002/.

⁴⁹ Craig Gilbert, “How two communities on Milwaukee’s North Shore achieved sky-high levels of absentee voting despite coronavirus,” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, April 10, 2020, www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/04/10/wisconsin-absentee-ballot-forms-sent-whitefish-bay-bayside-voters/5129125002/.

to mail ballot applications to every registered voter.⁵⁰ And in Florida, **Broward County** is among multiple counties taking similar steps.⁵¹

Key Considerations

Voting at home may be a critical component of safe ballot access this year, but this option is not for everyone. Relying on mail service may not work well in rural areas and tribal lands, in particular. There are voters with temporary addresses, language needs, disabilities, and additional circumstances to consider. Jurisdictions can alleviate some of these concerns by consulting with tribal leaders on what would work locally (including using designated buildings for mail), consulting with disability advocates, ensuring there are sufficient in-person polling places for people who require assistance or accommodation (e.g., people requiring translation services), and making sure there are sufficient ballot drop-boxes available.

Another set of considerations stems from the higher volume of mail-in ballots. Ask your local election administrators how prepared they are: Is there a clear plan in place with print vendors, including quality control, to print and mail the ballot applications and then the ballots themselves? Does ballot counting start early enough to account for the larger number of returned mail-in ballots? Are there enough high-speed ballot processing machines, which require funding and months of lead time to order? Is the notice and curing process (e.g., for ballots with missing signatures) adequately staffed? Election officials need to make plans early, look at each potential vulnerability in their vote-by-mail systems, and communicate clearly with the public. Luckily, there is a wealth of experience to draw upon in places successfully conducting elections where most people are voting from the comfort and safety of their homes.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ryan Deto, "Allegheny County is sending all county voters mail-in ballot applications with prepaid postage," Pittsburgh City Paper, April 17, 2020, www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/allegheny-county-is-sending-all-county-voters-mail-in-ballot-applications-with-prepaid-postage/Content?oid=17142631.

⁵¹ David Smiley, "Mail voting expected to 'explode' in Florida as coronavirus reshapes 2020 elections," Miami Herald, April 22, 2020, www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/article242180901.html.

⁵² Amber Phillips, "What Voting by Mail Looks like When It Works," Washington Post, June 12, 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/12/how-voting-by-mail-works-colorado/.

Sample Policy Language: AN ORDINANCE requiring that the [JURISDICTION] provide mail-in ballot applications to each individual registered to vote in [JURISDICTION].

[Adapted from Allegheny County, PA's Ordinance expanding vote by mail.⁵³]

WHEREAS, the capability of mail-in ballots establishes a ready-made option for eligible individuals who wish to exercise their Constitutionally guaranteed right to cast their votes, but who have concerns relating to their health while voting in the crowded environment of a traditional polling place during a widespread contagious disease outbreak; and

WHEREAS, when viewed in the context of the same considerations that gave rise to [STATE'S EMERGENCY DECLARATION], voting in person could raise the risk of infection and community spread and put our poll workers, many of whom are members of our most vulnerable populations, as well as the general voting public at risk; and

WHEREAS, as of [DATE], [JURISDICTION] had [#] mail-in and absentee ballot applications submitted online, and another [#] paper requests processed as well, for [#] total requests, a number which reflects only about [#] percent of the number of ballots cast in the last presidential primary (#); and

WHEREAS, it is the judgment of [GOVERNING BODY] that widespread use of mail-in ballots would constitute a meaningful step in mitigating the dangers of COVID-19 transmission, as it would alleviate crowds at polling places; and

WHEREAS, it is accordingly the desire of [GOVERNING BODY] to provide for the use of mailed ballots on the largest scale that is practicable;

SECTION I. INCORPORATION OF THE PREAMBLE. *The provisions in the preamble to this Ordinance are incorporated by reference in their entirety.*

SECTION II. MAILED BALLOT APPLICATIONS.

- (a) No later than [DATE], the [LOCAL ELECTION BOARD/OFFICIAL] shall mail an application for a "Vote By Mail" ballot to all individuals registered to vote in polling places located within [JURISDICTION].
- (b) Postage for sending and returning such applications shall be paid by [JURISDICTION].

⁵³ An ordinance requiring that the Allegheny County Elections Division provide mail-in ballot applications to each individual registered to vote in Allegheny County, Allegheny County, posting.pghcitypaper.com/media/pdf/draft_mailed_ballot_ord.pdf#viewer.action=download.

SECTION III. BALLOTS.

- (a) In accordance with state law, the [ELECTIONS BOARD] shall provide "Vote By Mail" ballots to all individuals who submit a validly completed application on or before [DATE].
- (b) Postage for sending and returning such ballots shall be paid by [JURISDICTION].

SECTION IV. EXPENDITURES.

- (a) The appropriate officers are hereby authorized to conduct any and all necessary actions to effectuate the intent of this Ordinance.
- (b) To the extent that any action(s) taken pursuant to the terms of this Ordinance require amendment of any [JURISDICTION] budget bill containing appropriations that are in force as of the effective date of this Ordinance, the [CHIEF EXECUTIVE] shall submit the appropriate amendatory legislation for adoption by Council no later than [DATE].

SECTION V. EFFECTIVE DATE OF ORDINANCE.

- (c) The provisions of this Ordinance shall become effective immediately upon final approval.

SECTION VI. SEVERABILITY. *[STANDARD SEVERABILITY CLAUSE]*

SECTION VII. REPEALER. *Any Resolution or Ordinance or part thereof conflicting with the provisions of this Ordinance is hereby repealed so far as the same affects this Ordinance.*

OFFER SUFFICIENT IN-PERSON VOTING OPTIONS

The Challenge

While expanding vote-by-mail is crucial to providing a large number of voters with a safe ballot option, many voters will still need to vote in-person, even during a pandemic—whether due to disability, the need for assistance, because they did not request a mail-in ballot, or simply because they are more comfortable voting in person.⁵⁴ Even though Georgia's Secretary of State this year sent out vote-by-mail applications to all registered voters, many people still showed up to vote in-person in the June primary—more than election officials were expecting.⁵⁵ With high turnout predicted this November, local election officials and electeds need to be prepared for high volumes of both mail-in ballots and in-person voting.⁵⁶

For election volunteers and in-person voters, we need to ensure polling places are safe, sanitized, and accessible during the pandemic. We also need to make sure there are enough polling places open, and open long enough hours, to reduce crowding—particularly in the communities of color that too regularly bear the burden of crowding and longer lines, as we saw in the Georgia and Wisconsin primaries earlier this year. Long lines at polling places are always a failure of democracy, but this year they are also a major health hazard. Wisconsin health officials reported at least 50 people who voted in or staffed the April primary tested positive for COVID-19 in the weeks that followed. The true number is likely much higher. It is critical to set up in-person polling so that voters can spread out without standing in long lines and exposing poll workers to high volumes of people.

The main reason for polling place closures is poll worker shortages. Election workers and volunteers are disproportionately 65 and older—the group most at risk of death from a COVID-19 infection. This staffing challenge was a significant factor in many of the polling place closures during June primaries in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. Some election administrators this primary season had to close polling places at the last minute to consolidate staff, surprising and confusing voters who

⁵⁴ It is equally important to protect same-day voter registration in the states that have it. See, "Same Day Voter Registration," National Conference of State Legislatures, June 28, 2019, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx.

⁵⁵ Richard Fausset & Reid J. Epstein, "Georgia's Election Mess: Many Problems, Plenty of Blame, Few Solutions for November," New York Times, June 10, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/us/politics/georgia-primary-election-voting.html.

⁵⁶ Nick Corasaniti & Michael Wines, "Beyond Georgia: A Warning for November as States Scramble to Expand Vote-by-Mail," New York Times, June 10, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/us/politics/voting-by-mail-georgia.html.

suddenly needed to find their new location and then travel there to vote.⁵⁷ If cities do not recruit a diverse enough group of election workers and provide them with enough personal protective equipment, sanitation tools, hazard pay, and (most important) a clear plan, we will likely face the same election failures again this November.

Solution: Incentivize Public Employees & Students to Serve as Election Workers

To ensure elections work, local jurisdictions should allow interested public employees to train and serve as election workers without using a vacation day or taking unpaid time off, give students Election Day off to volunteer (possibly for credit), and provide all election workers with hazard pay to recognize the risks they are taking and incentivize their attendance.

By heavily impacting older people who tend to be the majority of poll workers, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an intense challenge for staffing in-person voting, exacerbating the recent decline in poll workers,⁵⁸ and the long lines, particularly in communities of color, which contribute to decreased voter turnout and are a disproportionate health risk during the pandemic.⁵⁹ These suggested reforms would help ensure that local polling places are properly staffed, reducing wait times, ballot counting issues, and voter confusion.

Cities and counties can implement the public employee policy in several ways, depending on the rules of their state. For example, some cities and counties take the modest step of simply **allowing interested public employees to take paid time off to train and work as poll workers without having to request the time off with their supervisors**.⁶⁰ Other cities and counties go one step further and release public employees from their work assignments on Election Day.⁶¹ This further incentivizes them to volunteer in elections by allowing them to collect their regular pay as well as any stipend they receive as poll workers.

⁵⁷ John Wagner, Colby Itkowitz and Felicia Sonmez, "Democratic Primaries Highlights: Sanders to Assess His Campaign; Primary Schedule in Flux Amid Pandemic," Washington Post, March 18, 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/17/democratic-primaries-ohio-arizona-florida-illinois/.

⁵⁸ Election Administration and Voting Survey, U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2017, www.eac.gov/research-and-data/2016-election-administration-voting-survey/.

⁵⁹ Reid Wilson, "Study: Voters in Black Neighborhoods Face Longer Wait Times," The Hill, September 11, 2019, www.thehill.com/homenews/campaign/460965-study-voters-in-black-neighborhoods-face-longer-wait-times.

⁶⁰ Matt Vasilogambros, "Few People Want to be Poll Workers, and That's a Problem," Pew, October 22, 2018, www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2018/10/22/few-people-want-to-be-poll-workers-and-thats-a-problem.

⁶¹ Ibid.

School districts and colleges can also do their part. Serving as an election worker is a great way for young people to get more engaged in our democracy, even those not old enough to vote. In most states you can be under eighteen years old and still serve as an election worker.⁶² To that end, **schools and colleges should take steps to make it as easy and attractive as possible for students to serve as election workers**. For example, school districts could give students the day off, schools and colleges could make election work an automatic excuse for students, or they could provide students with school credit for their service.

In addition to adequately staffing and setting up polling places to be as safe as possible, **an important way to respect the work that election workers are doing to keep our democracy functioning during this pandemic is with hazard pay**.⁶³ Public employers and many businesses have recognized that hazard pay is the most effective way to ensure essential workers choose to remain on the job during the uncertainty of the pandemic. Hazard pay is effective, and it's the right thing to do. How functional and inclusive this year's election will be depends heavily on the role these election workers are choosing to take on. Hazard pay is the least we can do to respect that work and show them we understand how vitally important they are to our democracy.

Examples

Many states allow public employees to serve as poll workers, but it usually requires authorization from the local government. Luckily, more cities and counties are discovering that this reform is a great way to ensure polling places are well staffed. Both the city and county of **Milwaukee, WI** allow public employees paid time off to serve as poll workers.⁶⁴ Other counties, including **Maricopa County, AZ**⁶⁵ and **Contra Costa County, CA**,⁶⁶ take a slightly different approach: allowing public employees to serve as election workers (including accepting the stipend) without taking personal time off.

⁶² "Election Poll Workers," National Conference of State Legislatures, June 17, 2020, www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/election-poll-workers637018267.aspx.

⁶³ Terina Allen, "Up To \$25,000 Hazard Pay For Essential Workers 'One Of Our Very Highest Priorities'," Forbes, April 22, 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/terinaallen/2020/04/22/up-to-25000-hazard-pay-for-essential-workers-one-of-our-very-highest-priorities/#1bbdc36c36d1.

⁶⁴ Isiah Holmes, "Milwaukee County Proposal Aims to Help Staff Polling Sites," Wisconsin Examiner, November 11, 2019, www.wisconsinexaminer.com/brief/milwaukee-county-proposal-aims-to-help-staff-polling-sites/.

⁶⁵ Matt Vasilogambros, "Few People Want to be Poll Workers, and That's a Problem," Pew, October 22, 2018, www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2018/10/22/few-people-want-to-be-poll-workers-and-thats-a-problem.

⁶⁶ "Become a Poll Worker," Contra Costa County Elections, www.cocovote.us/poll-worker-center/become-a-poll-worker/.

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have set up youth poll worker programs, with different restrictions on who may serve (e.g., thirty-one states require that youth be at least sixteen years old). State laws have always allowed students who are over eighteen to serve as poll workers, and some colleges or universities have created programs to explicitly encourage the practice. One excellent example is the “Poll-Worker Initiative” at the [City University of New York \(CUNY\)](#), which “recruits and trains hundreds of students to serve as poll-workers with the Board of Elections to help address shortages for the city-wide primary and general elections” and “provides for on-campus poll worker trainings at select CUNY campuses across the five boroughs.”⁶⁷

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, many municipalities have passed resolutions to provide hazard pay or stipends to essential public workers, including [Atlanta, GA](#); [Baltimore, MD](#); and [Detroit, MI](#).⁶⁸ Few municipalities appear to have approved hazard pay for election or poll workers so far this year, but that number may grow as we approach Election Day.

Key Considerations

When it comes to allowing public employees or students to be poll workers, the key consideration is one of implementation: supervisors at public agencies and teachers or professors at schools or colleges must be trained on this policy. Supervisors need to assure staff that they will not be penalized for volunteering, and teachers need to assure students they will receive accommodations for any classes they miss. One of the best ways to address this challenge is to craft policies that do not simply allow public employees or students to become poll workers, but encourage and celebrate those who choose to volunteer. For example, the public employee poll worker program implemented in [Orange County, CA](#) includes a goal of county employees making up 10 percent of poll workers, and it also allows county employees to collect a full day’s pay plus a \$50 stipend for their work at the polls.⁶⁹ A [Suffolk University](#) study on student poll-worker programs found that successful programs integrated student poll-worker

⁶⁷ “Poll-Worker Initiative,” The City University of New York, www.cuny.edu/employment/student-jobs/jobs/poll-worker-initiative/.

⁶⁸ Laura French, “Local Governments Providing Hazard Pay, Stipends for First Responders,” EMS1.com, May 27, 2020, www.ems1.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/local-governments-providing-hazard-pay-stipends-for-first-responders-Oe7UtlA42phouiP4/.

⁶⁹ J. Mijin Cha and Liz Kennedy, “Millions to the Polls,” Demos, 2014 www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Millions%20to%20the%20Polls.pdf.

service with academics—for example, “[using] poll worker programs as service-learning opportunities, offer[ing] course credit, or offer[ing] poll work in lieu of a research paper.”⁷⁰

Additionally, the policies must take into account that serving as an election worker means more than simply working on Election Day or during an early voting period: new election workers will also need to be granted time off to train. Many of the most seasoned election workers, with institutional knowledge from years of volunteering, are senior citizens and may choose to stay home—new volunteers might not have those veterans to turn to for questions, which makes the upfront training they receive all the more important.

Finally, it is important to note that while students and public employees can help staff polling places, the state is ultimately responsible under the Voting Rights Act for accurately staffing, funding, and maintaining polling place infrastructure. These policies should be thought of as stop-gap measures—complements to, rather than replacements for, the long-term investment in ensuring we have well-funded and well-staffed polling places for years to come.

⁷⁰ Rachael V. Cobb, “Strategies for Success: Starting a College Poll Worker Program,” Suffolk University, 2006, www.mesacc.edu/community-civic-engagement/journals/strategies-success-starting-college-poll-worker-program.

Sample Policy Language: A RESOLUTION permitting [JURISDICTION] employees to receive paid time off to work at [JURISDICTION] polling locations on Primary and General Election Days

[Adapted from Milwaukee County Board's Resolution permitting Milwaukee County employees to receive paid time off to work at Milwaukee County municipal polling locations on Primary and General Election Days.⁷¹]

WHEREAS, municipalities often struggle to provide adequate poll workers for primary and general elections, and the inability to efficiently administer polling places can lead to, among other things, long lines, which may discourage people from voting and cause delays in reporting election results; and WHEREAS, many people do not register to be a poll worker because of the necessary advance training and because the shift on Election Day often requires them to use vacation days or take unpaid leave from their regular job.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the policy of [JURISDICTION] shall be to allow to the greatest extent practicable and legally possible, the ability of [JURISDICTION] public employees to work in municipal polling locations on Election Day for primary, general, and special elections.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, [JURISDICTION] workers, subject to the approval of their department head or supervisor, may be released, with pay, from their work assignment to train or serve as a poll worker at a polling location without using paid-time off; alternatively, employees may use paid time off to train or serve as a poll-employee during their regularly scheduled working hours while also receiving additional compensation.

⁷¹ "A Resolution by Supervisor Weishan, Jr., Establishing a Policy of Permitting Milwaukee County Employees to Receive Paid Time Off to Work at Milwaukee County municipal polling locations on Primary and General Election Days," Milwaukee County, October, 23 2019, milwaukeecounty.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7825223&GUID=5228E037-7853-42AA-BBFC-FBC0D74FCE6B.

Sample Policy Language: A RESOLUTION concerning excused student absences who serve as election/poll workers.

[Model Resolution Created by Local Progress and the Center for Popular Democracy.]

WHEREAS, many of the election workers who help maintain our democracy are senior citizens who are particularly at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic; and,

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the number of election/poll workers available or willing to work polling places and election sites this year and additional poll workers would be of great service to our democracy; and,

WHEREAS, the [DISTRICT/COLLEGE] seeks to create a culture of voting and to encourage and support civic participation among its students; and

WHEREAS, the opportunity to serve as an election worker is an excellent way for students to learn about our democracy first hand.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that students in [DISTRICT/COLLEGE] who choose to serve as poll workers will be automatically granted an excused absence, so long as they provide sufficient notice to their [TEACHERS/PROFESSORS].

***[Adapted from Prince George's County resolution authorizing
hazard pay for essential public workers⁷²]***

WHEREAS, COVID-19 continues to pose an imminent risk to the health, safety, and welfare of [JURISDICTION] residents; and,

WHEREAS, [JURISDICTION] election/poll workers are demonstrating dedication and courage by staffing polling places and serving voters during this time.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, [JURISDICTION] will show appreciation for this work by providing additional compensation for our election/poll workers who are keeping our democracy functioning in this challenging time.

SECTION I: HAZARD PAY

- a) Election/poll workers shall, in addition to the amount of compensation currently authorized, will additionally receive a temporary hazard pay increase of 10 percent of their base pay for hours worked.
- b) This compensatory period will apply to any election/poll workers from [START DATE] through December 31, 2020.

⁷² "A Resolution Concerning COVID-19 Hazard Pay and Compensatory Time for Employees Covered by Salary Schedule L," Prince George's County City Council, May 11, 2020, princegeorgescountymd.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4432897&GUID=1AE2ACCE-7285-4AB1-A5EC-FCC05510A466&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=CR-15-2020.

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR LOCAL ELECTED LEADERS TO LEAD IN THIS MOMENT

The reforms we have suggested in this toolbox are in response to the rapidly changing COVID-19 pandemic. Whether or not you are able to advance some of these reforms, there will be many decisions made between now and Election Day that will impact voters' ability to cast a ballot safely in your community. Our democracy is facing a challenge this year unlike any it has ever faced before. If we as a country are going to rise to this challenge, we all must do our part. We created this toolbox believing that local elected leaders can lead the way. We hope that it can be a resource for all those seeking to keep our elections safe and functioning, no matter the conditions this Election Day.⁷³

⁷³ If you are a local elected leader who would like support doing this work, please reach out to Matt Duffy (mduffy@populardemocracy.org).