



More than 800 public health experts call on Congress to fund mail-in voting

BY MAGGIE MILLER - 05/05/20 05:26 PM EDT

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A group of more than 800 public health experts on Tuesday called on Congress to fund mail-in voting amid rising concerns about in-person voting related to the coronavirus pandemic.

The experts — made up of professors, psychologists and doctors led by the Center for American Progress — [sent a letter](#) to the House and Senate asking that states be given \$4 billion to address moving to mail-in voting.

These funds would cover the mailing and printing of ballots, securing ballot request systems and staffing, among other issues.

“In order to ensure the integrity of the electoral process and protect the public health at the same time, it is incumbent on our leaders to prepare for a Presidential election by mail, in which ballots are sent to all registered voters, to allow them to vote from home and ensure their health and safety in the event of a new outbreak of SARS-CoV-2,” the public health experts wrote.

The experts used the recent Wisconsin primary elections as an example of how COVID-19 can spread if Americans are forced to vote in-person, after dozens of individuals there tested positive for the coronavirus in the weeks since the election.

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“Many of us in public health looked on with horror as thousands of people in Wisconsin were forced to choose between exercising their right to vote and staying home to protect themselves from exposure to the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2,” the group wrote. “Those choosing the former were imperiling their own lives by voting in person that day.”

Congress already appropriated \$400 million for states to address election concerns during the pandemic as part of the \$2 trillion stimulus package signed into law in March. These funds were on top of millions already sent to the states to boost election security by Congress in December.

But the public health experts said Tuesday that these funds were not enough, pointing to a study by New York University’s Brennan Center for Justice that states would need \$4 billion to successfully put on elections this year.

The group of experts included professors from dozens of academic institutions, including Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Columbia and Brown universities, along with psychologists from across the country and doctors within multiple health care systems or hospitals.

The letter was rolled out during a press call on mail-in voting that featured Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Chris Coons (D-Del.). Klobuchar and Coons, along with Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), have led efforts in the Senate over the past two months to fund mail-in voting.

“As more than 800 health officials say in their letter, we have to think about public health and safety, no one should be forced to choose between their right to vote and their health,” Coons said during the call.

Coons serves as the top Democrat on the Senate subcommittee tasked with election funding. He said past debates around sending states election funding have been “contentious,” and that it had been difficult to secure Republican support.

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Many Republicans, including President Trump and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), have voiced opposition to mail-in voting, citing concerns around voter fraud and that it could hurt Republican election chances.

But Klobuchar said that support for mail-in voting from leaders including Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and former first lady Michelle Obama, who have both backed the effort, may sway Republicans to back including the funds in future coronavirus stimulus packages.



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“I just think that it will be very, very hard in the end, with Speaker Pelosi leading the way, for our Republican colleagues to vote down a bill,” Klobuchar said.

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