

Statement of Stacey Y. Abrams
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On Protecting the Right to Vote During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Testimony before the House Judiciary's Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil
Rights, and Civil Liberties

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Thank you, Chairman Cohen, Vice Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of the committee.

I come before you today as a voting rights advocate, as the founder of Fair Fight Action, and as an American deeply concerned about the challenges facing our democracy, particularly in the era of COVID-19. Furthermore, I would do a disservice to millions of Americans if I did not acknowledge the anger and anguish that link together our demands for justice and the right to choose our leaders, and through them, the policies that govern us through the profound power of the right to vote.

Across our nation, we face a public health crisis, an economic disaster, continued distrust in our justice system and a coordinated assault on access to our democracy. Congressional action has been vital to respond to the pandemic, but access to the right to vote will determine how recovery and systemic justice are achieved.

The House of Representatives and the United States Senate previously allocated a vital \$400 million in appropriations for states to conduct elections this year. The House also took the necessary step of passing the HEROES Act, appropriating an additional \$3.6 billion to defend the right to vote. Financially-exhausted states are reliant upon the compact made with the federal government for mutual aid in times of catastrophic events. To support and expand vote by mail, to place critical guardrails on access, to educate voters on their options and to increase the safety of in-person voting, federal investment is urgent. The House has acknowledged this fundamental obligation – to ensure that the right to vote does not require mortal harm. Today, I urge your Senate colleagues to take immediate action and pass the HEROES Act, because our democracy demands it.

I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, and on April 7, I watched in horror as the cautionary tale of their election took place. None of us should forget the images of voters shivering in long lines and crowded into the vastly reduced number of in-person polling locations. The Wisconsin State Journal reports 71 known cases of coronavirus infections as a result.¹

The challenge is clear and uncontroverted: crowded polling places pose a health risk for voters and for the brave poll workers who risk their lives to help our democracy function during this pandemic. Our first obligation is to reduce the number of voters who will cast their votes in person on Election Day through national access to vote-by-mail. All states have the current capacity; however, we must remove unnecessary barriers to participation and scale infrastructure to allow widespread use of this safe, tested

¹ https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/health-med-fit/71-people-who-went-to-the-polls-on-april-7-got-covid-19-tie-to/article_ef5ab183-8e29-579a-a52b-1de069c320c7.html

and auditable method of balloting. Further, the American people want expanded access to vote by mail by a 2:1 margin, despite false reports of potential fraud.²

Voter fraud of any kind is extremely rare. As the New York Times noted, after 20 years, Oregon has documented an infinitesimal .00001% incidence rate of voter fraud.³ When we look at the nation as a whole, in 2016, more than half of the states reported zero substantiated allegations of voter fraud. Another 8 states reported one such allegation, and the remaining states found a de minimis number of cases, none sufficient to alter the outcome of elections.⁴ President Trump's own "Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity" was disbanded because the committee could not find significant evidence of fraud.⁵

Recent election results show that voting by mail offers neither party a partisan advantage.⁶ This finding confirms a fundamental truth: our elections should not be partisan. The selections we make will be cast along party lines, but the process of determining our leadership should not be. Leaders of both parties should want higher participation in our democracy, regardless of who wins.

Expanded use of vote-by-mail reduces the number of in-person voters, which will permit election administrators to meet the CDC guidelines for social distancing and health protocols. By reducing the population required to vote in person, we not only protect the voters but also those who will risk their lives to serve their fellow Americans.

America does best when we acknowledge our challenges and prepare for success. The solution to promote both public health and participation in our democracy is to expand access to vote by mail, and to establish uniform guidelines for 2020 so that where we live in our country will not diminish our right to participate in November's elections. The more Americans we can encourage to vote by mail, the safer in-person voting will be for all who need it: people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness or displacement, people with language barriers, and people who, despite their best efforts, did not receive their mail-in ballots in time or faced challenges with completion. However, in the 21st century, no American should have to choose between their health and exercising their right to vote.

I thank you for the opportunity to take part in this important hearing, and I urge you to continue to protect access to our democracy.

² [ABC News/Washington Post Poll May 25-28 2020](#) showed that Americans, by a 2-to-1 margin, favor increased access to vote by mail, despite false reports of widespread fraud.

³ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/18/us/voter-fraud.html>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/03/575524512/trump-dissolves-controversial-election-commission>

⁶ <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/there-is-no-evidence-that-voting-by-mail-gives-one-party-an-advantage/>