

The VoteSafe Act of 2020

This year, multiple primary elections were besieged by public health concerns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Georgia](#) delayed its primary election by nearly two months. In [Illinois](#), at least 50 polling sites opened late, and hundreds of poll workers backed out due to COVID-19. One day before the Wisconsin primary, the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) blocked a court order that would have extended the period for voters to return absentee ballots—forcing voters who had yet to receive their ballots to vote in-person at the polls. And in [Milwaukee](#), voters experienced long lines and hours-long wait times at the polls, after the number of polling places was reduced from 180 to five. The ongoing public health emergency highlights the need to ensure that every state can conduct a safe and reliable election process.

Access to vote-by-mail is a critical part of the solution. But currently, only 5 states conduct statewide vote-by-mail elections. 33 states and the District of Columbia collect ballots by mail or allow “no excuse” absentee voting, in which people can vote absentee for any reason. For the remaining states, a shift to voting by mail may entail logistical and/or legislative complications that could result in delays.

Even when vote-by-mail becomes available in every state, many voters will still choose the polls. Voting by mail can pose accessibility challenges for people with disabilities, especially blind, low-vision, or other print-disabled voters. Many Tribal communities in rural areas do not have traditional residential mailing addresses, which makes voting by mail less reliable. And in-person voting continues to hold great significance for African American voters, for whom the right to vote was hard won.

That is why Congress must deliver a comprehensive solution that help states expand voting options and maintain healthy and safe polling places. Accordingly, Senator Kamala D. Harris is introducing **The VoteSafe Act of 2020**.

The bill:

- **Authorizes a total of \$5 billion to expand vote-by-mail and early voting and to improve the safety of in-person voting during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- Requires states to **permit no-excuse mail-in absentee voting.**
- Requires states to maintain an **early voting period of at least 20 days.**
- **Provide grants for states to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of polling places.**
 - Permitted uses of funding include:
 - Funding to ensure that elections are accessible to individuals with disabilities.
 - Funding to ensure adequate protections for language minority voters.
 - Funding to ensure voting access for American Indian, Alaska Native, and rural voters.
 - Implementing and promoting curbside voting.
 - Implementing and meeting a maximum wait time standard or publishing current wait times for voters.
 - Allowing voters to make advance reservations at their polling places.
 - Providing for the training and recruitment of poll workers.
 - Improving access to voter registration.