

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

July 2, 2020

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are writing to urge the Department of State to ensure that Americans living overseas can safely vote during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic continues to restrict travel and mail service in many countries around the world. Without proper planning, this could jeopardize the ability for Americans overseas, including U.S. service members and diplomats, to vote in the November election.

The State Department, in coordination with the Department of Defense's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), plays a key role in ensuring one of the most fundamental rights of an American – the right to vote – is upheld for overseas and military voters. It does so by administering programs at embassies and consulates around the world that assist voters in understanding the process of overseas voting, providing voters with the resources to cast their ballots and understand their rights, and managing diplomatic pouch programs that forward completed ballots to U.S. election officials.

In light of the challenges to overseas voting posed by the coronavirus pandemic, we request that the Department provide information on the contingency plans being put into place to ensure that Americans overseas are able to vote in elections this year. We recognize that there may be conditions in individual countries that are beyond the control of U.S. officials that could make voting more difficult, but we must take steps now to attempt to overcome those challenges. Specifically, we request a response to the following questions regarding the Department's plans:


- We understand that to protect the health of its employees, the Department has limited consular services. If consular services are still curtailed in the fall, will the return of ballots be prioritized as an essential service? If additional consular officers are needed to ensure the ballots of overseas voters can be safely and securely returned, is there a plan to shift resources to this vital American Citizen Service?

- A review of embassy websites indicates that procedures for returning the ballots of overseas voters varies widely. Some embassies require person-to-person contact to deliver a ballot while others do not. Is the Department considering issuing guidance to embassies on procedures for receiving and returning ballots during the pandemic? Are new procedures being put into place that will allow "no contact" ballot drop-offs at all embassies and consulates to reduce potential exposure to the coronavirus?
- Is the Department planning any voter education or information campaigns to advise Americans living overseas on how to securely and safely cast their ballots in a timely fashion, the steps their embassy or consulate is taking to ensure their right to vote remains upheld, and information on how the Department is working to ensure their ballot is being forwarded to their home state even if coronavirus restrictions remain in place?

It is paramount that all Americans be able to cast their votes during the pandemic. Many Americans are serving our country overseas and their voices must be heard in the democracy they are working hard to protect and serve.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We request your response no later than July 20, 2020.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/S/ _____
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/S/ _____
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/S/ _____
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/S/ _____
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/S/ _____
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/S/
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

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Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/S/
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

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Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

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Dianne Feinstein
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cc
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