



April 11, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on  
Appropriations  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair, U.S. House Committee on  
Appropriations  
2207 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Vice Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on  
Appropriations  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on  
Appropriations  
2413 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bill Hagerty  
Chair, U.S. Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and  
General Government  
251 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dave Joyce  
Chair, U.S. House Committee on  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial  
Services and General Government  
2065 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial  
Services and General Government  
728 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steny Hoyer  
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial  
Services and General Government  
1705 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Hagerty,  
Ranking Member Reed, Chair Joyce, and Ranking Member Hoyer,

On behalf of the 56 undersigned organizations, we write to strongly urge you to allocate desperately needed funding for Election Security Grants in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget. Specifically, we urge you to support the state and local election officials who keep our democracy safe and secure with an appropriation of \$825 million in FY26. This much-needed appropriation would match the investment made during the most robust year of election appropriations in the first Trump Administration and will help meet the dire current need.<sup>1</sup>

Elections are the heart of American democracy, yet today our elections and election workers alike are facing unprecedented challenges: cyber attacks and influence campaigns led by foreign

adversaries;<sup>2</sup> rampant mis- and disinformation aimed at confusing voters, especially voters of color;<sup>3</sup> declining trust in the democratic process and institutions;<sup>4</sup> increasing threats to and attacks, both cyber and physical, on elections infrastructure and election workers;<sup>5</sup> new election laws that create additional responsibilities for, and in some cases complicate, election administration and make it harder for some communities to vote;<sup>6</sup> and the rise of generative AI and its potential to upend campaigns and elections;<sup>7</sup> to name a few. At the same time, the decades-old infrastructure through which we conduct our elections is aging, and much-needed repairs and modernizations can't keep up.<sup>8</sup> All at a moment when federal cybersecurity resources and technical assistance for election workers are disappearing.<sup>9</sup>

State and local election administrators need robust, reliable funding to effectively confront these challenges and ensure all eligible voters can cast a ballot that counts. Serving as a reliable partner in adequately funding our elections is one of the best ways the federal government can fulfill its duty to promote the exercise of the fundamental right to vote and protect our democracy.<sup>10</sup>

This letter details why a renewed commitment to robust federal funding is especially urgent right now, how additional funding would protect voting access and election workers alike, the need to pass significant funding through to localities who administer elections, why federal funding is essential in the face of private funding bans, and the strong bipartisan precedent and public support for significant federal funding for election administration.

### **Renewed Congressional Investment in Elections is Essential After Years of Declining Federal Funds and as Other Federal Resources Disappear**

Federal funding for election administration has varied considerably over the last two decades. After a significant initial investment in 2003 alongside the enactment of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), federal funding to states for election infrastructure and security has been a patchwork, including several years with no federal funding at all. In FY18 and FY20, Congress stepped back into its responsibility to help fund elections by sending \$380 million and \$425 million, respectively, in HAVA Election Security Grants to states. In 2020, Congress sent an additional \$400 million in CARES Act funding to support election officials to run safe, secure, accessible elections during COVID-19. That cumulative \$825 million investment in 2020, the final year of the first Trump Administration, represented the largest federal investment in elections in nearly two decades and was a lifeline to local election officials and voters alike. However, federal funding since then has been severely limited: \$0 in FY21, \$75 million in FY22 and FY23, \$55 million in FY24,<sup>11</sup> and just \$15 million for all 50 states and territories in the March 2025 Continuing Resolution.<sup>12</sup>

A robust appropriation of HAVA funds is even more essential as the federal government withdraws support for election security in other areas. Recently, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) froze all election security activities and fired or furloughed critical election security employees, pending an internal review.<sup>13</sup> That review was completed on March 6, but CISA and DHS have refused to make the report public or comment on whether any of the frozen election security activities or furloughed employees will be reactivated, creating significant concern and uncertainty among election officials.<sup>14</sup> Among those CISA employees furloughed or terminated were 10 Regional Election Security Advisors, experts

in election security and cyber readiness who served as the primary point of contact for election officials during cyber incidents and for training purposes. Staff were also cut from CISA's Election Security Resilience Team and Cybersecurity Advisory Committee.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time that CISA froze election security activities, it terminated funding for the Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC), which, through the non-profit Center for Internet Security, provided many of the free election cybersecurity services that election officials received from the federal government.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the advanced threat monitoring that the EI-ISAC provided state and local officials will be expensive or impossible to replace for many cash-strapped jurisdictions and will leave our election infrastructure more vulnerable to cyber-attack. CISA has provided critical technical support and information sharing to state and local election officials in a successful effort to fill this gap since 2018. State and local officials lack the funds and expertise necessary to replace these programs.

Further, there are concerns about the fate of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Election Threats Task Force, which has played an important role in protecting both voters and election security experts alike since 2020.<sup>17</sup> Already, the DOJ has disbanded its Foreign Influence Task Force, which since 2017 helped protect American elections from foreign interference, and was an important partner for state and local officials in defending against attacks on elections.<sup>18</sup>

*To improve the security and accessibility of elections, especially as critical federal resources from CISA and DOJ have disappeared, Congress should return to the level of investment that Congress and President Trump provided for election administration in 2020 – \$875 million.*

### **Robust Federal Funding is Critical to Ensure Voters Can Access the Ballot Box and to Protect Election Workers on the Frontline of our Democracy**

Absent significant dollars from state governments or Congress, elections are generally financed using general fund revenue, which is largely derived from local property and sales tax revenue.<sup>19</sup> This means affluent communities often have greater resources available for election administration than low-income communities. This reality leads to significant disparities in local spending on elections and can, in turn, impact voting access. The dearth of resources in low-income communities—including many rural communities and jurisdictions with large populations of color—has diminished voter access, particularly through closed polling places and scaled back voter outreach and education programs.<sup>20</sup> Officials cite the inability to pay for the sites, as well as staffing shortages, also a budget issue, as leading reasons for the closures.<sup>21</sup>

Voting access is further endangered by new election laws passed in several states in recent years that create both new barriers to voting and additional responsibilities for local election administrators with no accompanying funding for implementation.<sup>22</sup> Further, Congress is currently contemplating a bill that would dramatically limit the voting access and significantly complicate election administration. The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act would make it harder for millions of Americans to vote by requiring would-be-voters to prove their citizenship using a small set of documents, in person, every time they register or update their registration.<sup>23</sup> Millions of Americans do not have ready access to such citizenship documents,<sup>24</sup> and tens of millions of others registered via methods like online and mail-in

registration that would be functionally eliminated under the bill.<sup>25</sup> The SAVE Act would introduce tremendous new administrative burdens on election officials, leading a bipartisan group of nearly 60 election officials to express their opposition to the bill. As these election officials note: “This legislation places unfunded, operationally unrealistic, and legally precarious burdens on election offices across the country.”<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the growing administrative burdens they face, election officials are increasingly subject to hostile threats and, at times, serious risks to their safety and that of their staff and families. According to a recent survey, more than one in three local election officials (38%) have personally experienced threats, harassment, or abuse because of their job. More than half (54%) are concerned about the safety of their colleagues and staff, and 28% are concerned about their family or loved ones being harassed. One-fifth of all election officials surveyed said they are unlikely to continue to serve through the 2026 elections.<sup>27</sup>

These fears—and the role they play in driving long-time election administrators to leave their jobs—are illustrated by the case of Shasta County, California election administrator Cathy Darling Allen, who left her post in 2024 after 20 years. Asked about her decision to leave, Allen said “Being concerned on a daily basis about your own physical safety and the safety of the folks who work for us and the voters who come in to cast their ballots takes a toll.”<sup>28</sup>

Among local election officials surveyed in 2024, even before the recent reductions in federal cybersecurity resources, well over three-quarters (83%) already said their annual budgets needed to grow in the next five years to meet election administration and security needs. The same share (83%) cited additional funding as helpful for increasing the sense of safety for themselves and among their staff.<sup>29</sup>

*Rather than pursuing legislation that would introduce additional barriers to voting and burdens on election officials, Congress should send significant funding to these frontline democracy workers so they can provide a safe and secure working environment and ensure all eligible Americans can vote.*

### **Congress Can Help Remedy Challenges with the Existing Funding Landscape by Sending Funding Directly to Localities**

By and large, elections are run by local election officials and administrators.<sup>30</sup> Yet even though these local officials are responsible for successfully conducting all of our elections—local, state, and federal—their work is financed primarily with local funding.<sup>31</sup> These general fund dollars support a range of government functions, from schools, libraries, and parks to emergency services and law enforcement – meaning election funding must compete with a host of critical government services for limited dollars.<sup>32</sup> The reality, more often than not, is that there simply are not enough local dollars available to cover the cost of administering elections year after year.<sup>33</sup>

States also allocate resources in support of local election administration, though in most places, state contributions make up a very small share of local election budgets.<sup>34</sup> State spending on elections also varies greatly, and requests from local election officials for state funding to

support effective election administration sometimes go unanswered.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, because HAVA grants are transferred to the chief election official of each state and territory, many local officials who administer elections have been left out of these appropriations. While some states regularly subgrant HAVA funding to local jurisdictions, in others, that federal funding never makes its way to the people who need it most – local election workers running our elections.<sup>36</sup>

For example, Isaac Cramer, Executive Director of the Charleston County Board of Voter Registration and Elections, testified to Congress that “Numerous counties in South Carolina are unable to upgrade election infrastructure, including the security of their elections buildings, provide 24/7 camera surveillance, or have adequate space to prepare and test election equipment,” yet “South Carolina is one of several states that does not distribute HAVA funds to the local county level.”<sup>37</sup> In urging Congress to appropriate more election funding, Cramer flagged that “those funds also must get down to the people who run the elections day to day. All federal funding should be administered in coordination with or made available directly to counties.”<sup>38</sup>

*Given the local nature of election administration in nearly every state, Congress should institute a pass-through requirement such that two-thirds of allocated funds are sent directly to local election officials responsible for administering elections.*

### **Restrictions on Private Funding Exacerbate Problems and Highlight the Need for Robust Federal Funding**

The problems created by insufficient funding at all levels of government are exacerbated by a growing trend among states to prohibit local election administrators from accessing funding from private sources to fill the gaps. Since 2021, at least 29 states have enacted laws prohibiting, limiting, or regulating private funding for election administration,<sup>39</sup> largely in response to mis- and disinformation about the 2020 election.<sup>40</sup> Most recently, Wyoming lawmakers passed a ban on private funding over objections that the ban would hinder the ability of local service clubs to assist county clerks and prevent election officials from using private buildings as polling places. Such a ban further complicates election administration especially in rural areas where volunteers and public buildings are limited.<sup>41</sup>

In a well-functioning democracy, elections should be fully and robustly publicly funded. Yet year after year, we underfund our elections and leave local election administrators scrambling to keep our democracy afloat. Funding from nonpartisan third-party sources has played an essential role in filling the gaps and shoring up our elections. The only appropriate conditions under which to limit private funding of elections is full replacement of those displaced dollars with state and federal funding; the absence of such replacement funding in virtually every state that has passed such a ban only underscores the need for robust, regular funding from the federal government.

### **Bipartisan Precedent and Strong Public Support for Robust Federal Election Funding Provides a Roadmap for Congress in FY26**

There is a strong, bipartisan precedent for robust federal funding to support state and local election infrastructure. Federal grants to support election security and administration were

originally authorized by the Help America Vote Act of 2002, landmark legislation passed to support states to replace aging voting machines after problems emerged during the 2000 election and, more generally, to improve the administration of federal elections.<sup>42</sup> Through that law, which enjoyed significant bipartisan support, Congress sent \$3 billion to the states over three years for a major overhaul of their election infrastructure and made additional funding available for improving accessibility, encouraging civic participation, and recruiting poll workers.<sup>43</sup> More recently, bipartisan majorities in Congress appropriated \$380 and \$425 million for election security grants in FY18 and FY20, respectively.

There is also bipartisan agreement among the public that the federal government should play a greater role in funding our elections. According to a 2023 poll from the bipartisan election reform organization Issue One, 69% of Americans—74% of Democrats and 66% of Republicans—believe the federal government should be equally, or more, responsible for election funding than local and state authorities.<sup>44</sup> Just one in ten (11%) Americans believe that local municipalities and states should be solely responsible for funding elections.<sup>45</sup> When it comes to funding for elections, there is cross-partisan consensus that the federal government should take more responsibility than it currently does.

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There are few government responsibilities more vital in a democracy than the protection of the fundamental right to vote. And that right is under assault today, especially in communities of color. Just as each level of government in our federated system bears responsibility for protecting the right to vote, so, too, must each level of government contribute to financing the election infrastructure that makes that right real. As the House and the Senate negotiate the FY26 government funding bill, we strongly urge you to send \$825 million in HAVA Election Security Grants to state and localities. Because the bulk of election administration happens at the local level in nearly every state, we further urge you to direct two-thirds of the grant funding to local election administrators.

With questions or for additional information, please contact Laura Williamson, Senior Policy Advisor for Voting Rights at the Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, at [laura.williamson@splcenter.org](mailto:laura.williamson@splcenter.org) or 301.875.1631.

Sincerely,

Southern Poverty Law Center  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
A. Philip Randolph Institute  
Advancement Project  
AFT  
All Voting is Local Action  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees  
Arab American Institute (AAI)

Asbury United Methodist Church, DC  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)  
Campaign Legal Center  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
Common Cause  
Defend The Vote Action Fund  
Democracy SENTRY  
Dēmos  
Fair Elections Center  
Fair Fight Action  
FairVote  
Faith in Public Life Action  
Feminist Majority Foundation  
Fundors' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)  
Impact Fund  
Interfaith Alliance  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
League of Conservation Voters  
League of Women Voters of the United States  
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.  
Nathaniel R. Jones Foundation  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)  
National Urban League  
National Women's Law Center Action Fund  
Native American Rights Fund  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New Disabled South  
Nonprofit VOTE  
People Power United  
Popular Democracy in Action  
SEIU  
Sojourners  
Southern Coalition for Social Justice  
Stand Up America  
State Democracy Defenders Action  
State Voices  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
The Faithful Democracy Coalition  
The Workers Circle  
Transformative Justice Coalition  
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice  
Verified Voting  
Voter Participation Center

## VoteRiders

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<sup>1</sup> Election Administration: Federal Grant Funding for States and Localities, Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2023, Table 2, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46646>.

<sup>2</sup> Combatting Foreign Influence, U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/foreign-influence>.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Fernando, “Election disinformation campaigns targeted voters of color in 2020. Experts expect 2024 to be worse,” Associated Press, July 29, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/elections-voting-misinformation-race-immigration-712a5c5a9b72c1668b8c9b1eb6e0038a>.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low,” Gallup, July 5, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394283/confidence-institutions-down-average-new-low.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> “Election workers brace for a torrent of threats: ‘I Know Where You Sleep’,” Washington Post, November 8, 2022,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/11/08/election-workers-online-threats/><https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/11/08/election-workers-online-threats/>. “Local Election Officials Survey — May 2024,” Brennan Center for Justice, May 1, 2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-may-2024>.

<sup>6</sup> Natalia Galicza, “New election law adds new financial costs for some Florida counties,” WUSF, October 15, 2021, <https://www.wusf.org/politics-issues/2021-10-15/new-election-law-adds-new-financial-costs-for-some-florida-counties>. See also Emma Hurt, “Why Local Election Officials in Georgia Take Issue With Many Parts of New Law,” NPR, April 16, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/16/987825440/why-local-election-officials-in-georgia-take-issue-with-many-parts-of-new-law>.

<sup>7</sup> Risk in Focus: Generative A.I. and the 2024 Election Cycle, U.S. Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, <https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/risk-focus-generative-ai-and-2024-election-cycle>.

<sup>8</sup> “50 States of Need,” Election Infrastructure Initiative, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6083502fc0f6531f14d6e929/t/61f836e405feca3722d63b9d/1643656990641/50-States-Of-Need.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Maggie Miller, “The Trump admin cut election security funds. Now officials fear future elections may be ‘less secure,’” Politico, March 31, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/31/trump-admin-cut-election-security-funds-00258787>.

<sup>10</sup> 52 U.S.C §20501

<sup>11</sup> Election Administration: Federal Grant Funding for States and Localities, Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2023, Table 2, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46646>.

<sup>12</sup> Public Law No: 119-4, Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extension Act, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1968/text>.

<sup>13</sup> *Supra* note 9.

<sup>14</sup> Derek B. Johnson and Colin Wood, “CISA completed its election security review. It won’t make the results public,” Cyberscoop, March 7, 2025, <https://cyberscoop.com/cisa-election-security-review-lacks-transparency/>.

<sup>15</sup> Christina A. Cassidy, “US cyber agency puts election security staffers who worked with the states on leave,” AP, February 10, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/election-security-cisa-kristi-noem-cybersecurity-5bac8ce416c46b4fbc44c94ae5874b39>.

<sup>16</sup> *Supra* note 9. See also Center for Internet Security, <https://www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac>, noting as of April 4, 2025 that “Due to the termination of funding by the Department of Homeland Security, the Center for Internet Security no longer supports the EI-ISAC.”

<sup>17</sup> Edward Graham, “Democrats push Justice Department to keep Election Threats Task Force amid rollbacks,” Next Gov, March 18, 2025, <https://www.nextgov.com/policy/2025/03/democrats-push-justice-department-keep-election-threats-task-force-amid-rollbacks/403858/?oref=ng-skybox-hp>.

<sup>18</sup> Derek B. Johnson, “DOJ disbands foreign influence task force, limits scope of FARA prosecutions,” Cyberscoop, February 6, 2025, <https://cyberscoop.com/doj-disbands-foreign-influence-task-force/>.

<sup>19</sup> Urban Institute & Brookings Institution, Tax Policy Center, “Briefing Book,” <https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/what-are-sources-revenue-state-and-local-governments>.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Nichols, “Closed voting sites hit minority counties harder for busy midterm elections,” USA Today, October 30, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/10/30/midterm-elections-closed-voting-sites-impact-minority-voter-turnout/1774221002/>.

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- <sup>23</sup> H.R.22, the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, introduced January 3, 2025, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/04/03/republicans-banning-outside-groups-funding-election-zuckerberg/73119478007/>.
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- <sup>27</sup> “Local Election Officials Survey — May 2024,” Brennan Center for Justice, May 1, 2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-may-2024>.
- <sup>28</sup> Derek B. Johnson, “Picketed at work, confronted at church: Why election workers have left the job,” Cyberscoop, June 20, 2024, <https://cyberscoop.com/picketed-at-work-confronted-at-church-why-election-workers-have-left-the-job/>.
- <sup>29</sup> *Supra* note 27.
- <sup>30</sup> “The State and Local Role in Election Administration: Duties and Structures,” Congressional Research Service March 4, 2019, 7, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45549>.
- <sup>31</sup> *Supra* note 19.
- <sup>32</sup> Tara Veazey, *State and Local Spending on the Administration of Elections: Insights From a Review of 12 States and 93 Localities*, Institute for Responsive Government, October 23, 2023, <https://responsivegov.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/State-and-Local-Spending-on-the-Administration-of-Elections-Insights-From-a-Review-of-12-States-and-93-Localities.pdf>. *See also* “State and Local Expenditures,” Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/state-and-local-finance-initiative/state-and-local-backgrounders/state-and-local-expenditures>.
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- <sup>36</sup> “ES Funds,” Election Assistance Commission, [www.eac.gov/payments-and-grants/es-snapshot](http://www.eac.gov/payments-and-grants/es-snapshot).
- <sup>37</sup> Testimony of Mr. Isaac Cramer, Executive Director of the Charleston County Board of Voter Registration and Elections, U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration, full committee hearing: “Administration of Upcoming Elections,” March 12, 2024, [https://www.rules.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/98abfbe5-9d21-90c4-9d9a-3fc640919655/Testimony\\_Cramer1.pdf](https://www.rules.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/98abfbe5-9d21-90c4-9d9a-3fc640919655/Testimony_Cramer1.pdf).
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- <sup>42</sup> 52 U.S.C. §21007
- <sup>43</sup> *Supra* note 11, at 2.

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<sup>44</sup> “Overwhelming public support for federal funding of elections,” Issue One and Citizen Data, April 19, 2023, <https://issueone.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/IO-ElectionsPollingMemo2023.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*