



## The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

April 21, 2026

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 Southern Poverty Law Center, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the 84 undersigned organizations, we write to strongly urge you to allocate adequate funding for Election Security Grants in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 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 FY27 under existing HAVA grant restrictions and terms, while directing two-thirds of that funding to localities, which by and large administer our elections.

This much-needed appropriation would match the investment made during the most robust year of election appropriations during the first Trump Administration and will help meet the considerable current need. The \$45 million in HAVA funding included in FY26 appropriations will help local election offices address immediate security and infrastructure needs. However, without sustained, predictable funding at levels that reflect the true cost of election administration, local officials cannot plan effectively, protect election infrastructure and workers alike, or maintain voter access and confidence.

### **The FY26 Increase Was a Promising Start; Greater Federal Investment in Elections Is Needed for Safe, Secure, Accessible Elections Nationwide**

Local elections offices urgently need resources to improve the security and accessibility of our election infrastructure. After strong federal investments in election administration during the first Trump Administration—\$380 million FY18 and \$825 million FY20<sup>1</sup>—appropriations have dropped off precipitously, bottoming out in FY25, with Congress sending just \$15 million to the 50 states and territories to support state and local election security.<sup>2</sup> Encouragingly, Congress made a strong commitment to reversing this worrisome trend in FY26, increasing funding for HAVA Election Security grants to \$45 million.<sup>3</sup> We appreciate this increased investment in protecting our elections. However, significantly more funding is needed in FY27 and beyond. After multiple fiscal years of meager federal funding, election officials need a substantial investment to cover the gaps, and they need the assurance that federal funding will be consistent and reliable in future fiscal years.

Robust, reliable funding from Congress will allow state and local election officials to effectively confront the myriad challenges they face today. To name just a few, election officials are facing cyber and physical security risks with fewer federal supports to address them,<sup>4</sup> growing threats to their safety and that of their staff and families,<sup>5</sup> increasingly frequent emergencies like natural disasters,<sup>6</sup> the proliferation of election related mis- and disinformation,<sup>7</sup> and ever-changing state-level laws that make it harder for eligible voters—especially voters of color—to make their voices heard.<sup>8</sup>

Small county budgets were never intended to account for cybersecurity attacks by foreign actors or sophisticated AI mass bomb threats.<sup>9</sup> As one local election official in Georgia put it, “I need the feds to fight nation states because my IT director can’t fight a nation state. He does a great job. He can’t fight China.”<sup>10</sup> Federal funding partnership is more urgent than ever following the recent devastating reduction in federal cybersecurity resources. In 2025, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) ended critical election security activities and fired several highly valuable election security experts who had been supporting state and local election officials.<sup>11</sup>

Robust federal funding will allow these offices on the frontlines of our elections to implement basic best practices, such as risk-limiting audits, secure ballot storage, and two-factor authentication for system access. It will also ensure we can protect our election workers, improve public trust by implementing security improvements, and ultimately run safe, secure elections in which every eligible voter 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>12</sup>

### **Robust Federal Funding Helps Protect Election Workers and Voting Access**

The local election officials who keep our democracy running year after year are increasingly subject to hostile threats and risks to their safety and that of their staff and families. According to an annual nationwide survey of election officials, in 2025, more than one in three local election officials (38 percent) personally experienced threats, harassment, or abuse because of their job. More than half (52 percent) were concerned about the safety of their colleagues and staff, and 26 percent were concerned about their family or loved ones being harassed.<sup>13</sup> Reports ahead of the 2024 elections found that incidents of threats and harassment were up 73 percent compared to the same period leading up to the 2022 elections<sup>14</sup> and included threats as alarming as hanging and assassination.<sup>15</sup>

Among those local election officials surveyed, a considerable majority (60 percent) are concerned about federal cuts to election security services, including those critical resources and services previously provided by CISA.<sup>16</sup> Three-quarters (75 percent) of surveyed local election officials said their annual budgets need to grow in the next five years to meet election administration and security needs, and a full 87 percent of those surveyed said additional government resources would help make up for the eliminated federal cybersecurity and other essential supports.<sup>17</sup>

These challenges facing election officials are exacerbated by ever-changing election laws in states across the country, especially since the 2020 election.<sup>18</sup> These changes—often passed without funding for implementation—have added considerable burdens to an already strained workforce. As just one example, consider the experience of Tammy Whitmire, Elections & Voter Registration Director in Rabun County, Georgia:

*To say that elections has moved and moved quickly is an understatement. [...] It seems like we're always trying to catch up. The laws are constantly changing. You're barely getting your poll workers really confident that they know how to use the equipment and all of a sudden you're using all new equipment. Since I've held this job, I feel like we've always been in a learning curve.*<sup>19</sup>

Most importantly, voters themselves have faced increasing burdens in the electoral process as a result of the slew of restrictive voting laws passed by dozens of states in recent years.<sup>20</sup> Some of these laws have resulted in closed polling places, the elimination of drop boxes, and restrictions on longstanding practices like community voter assistance and voter registration – changes that have reduced the ability of eligible voters to make their voices heard at the ballot box, the fundamental promise of our democracy.<sup>21</sup>

Further, resource disparities between jurisdictions—fueled by the reality that elections are overwhelmingly financed at the local level—mean voters in relatively poorer areas, especially rural areas, may see their voting access limited due to inadequately staffed polling places, shortened voting hours, insufficient voting materials, and inadequate voter education.<sup>22</sup> Robust,

regular federal funding can ensure that voters' access to the ballot isn't determined by whether they live in an urban or a rural county.

### **Federal Funding Helps Jurisdictions Become More Disaster Resilient**

Increased federal funding will also help election officials and jurisdictions prepare for natural disasters, which are increasing in both frequency and severity.<sup>23</sup> Election facilities, like any physical structure, need resources to withstand extreme weather and stay open—or reopen as quickly as possible—so they may continue to serve their core purpose of administering elections. To prepare physical infrastructure, election officials may need to purchase supplies like sandbags, fans, extra ink and paper, and backup generators, as well as technical supplies like battery backups for voting machines and other reserve equipment that would allow critical election infrastructure to maintain operability during a disaster. Election officials also need resources to create emergency plans, including identifying alternative polling places and creating backup staffing plans.<sup>24</sup>

Even with those preparations, election officials need reserved funds in the wake of a disaster to purchase emergency-specific supplies. For example, in the wake of Hurricane Helene in 2025, North Carolina election officials urgently needed portable toilets, tents, satellite devices, and ATVs to ensure elections could take place and Western North Carolinians could exercise their freedom to vote despite the devastation.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, election officials were able to purchase these supplies with state emergency management funds. While the coordination and prioritization of elections among state actors and agencies post-Helene in North Carolina is a success story, that kind of immediate and effective collaboration cannot be taken for granted everywhere. Robust, regular federal funding can help ensure election officials have adequate reserves with which to purchase essential supplies in the immediate aftermath of an emergency.

Administering elections during a disaster also requires significant human resources, including possible overtime pay for existing staff or funds to bring in new, temporary staff and get them trained quickly to fill staffing gaps. In Buncombe County, North Carolina, for example, about two weeks after Hurricane Helene, the county elections director reported that only 200 of the planned 600 Election Day workers had confirmed their availability.<sup>26</sup>

Disasters are also prime environments for the spread of election misinformation. Dedicated funding for emergency communications to voters allows election officials to inoculate against that misinformation by disseminating quality information and ensuring voter confidence in high-stakes elections. In Florida's Sarasota County, for example, in order to share accurate information with voters about polling place changes in the wake of Hurricane Helene, election officials had to spend \$25,000 on emergency mailings.<sup>27</sup>

Reflecting on the responsibility of running statewide elections in North Carolina in the wake of Hurricane Helene, former NC State Board of Elections Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell told Congress:

*We delivered voting in North Carolina because of advance preparation, strong communication, and intentional partnership with federal, state, and local emergency management and other support structures who provided funding and resources in an*

*emergency. However, we cannot let our guard down or become complacent ... We cannot retract resources or funding. Rather, more needs to be dedicated to the effort to ensure voting continues and ballots are counted no matter the circumstances.*<sup>28</sup>

As with all the other essential election needs detailed in this letter, more robust and reliable federal funding for election administration can serve as a lifeline for election officials as they plan for and recover from natural disasters and other emergencies.

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There are few government responsibilities more vital in a democracy than the protection of the fundamental right to vote. That right is under assault today, especially in communities of color. Robust, regular federal funding for election administration is essential as an antidote to that attack and to ensure election officials can run safe, secure, accessible elections in which all eligible voters can cast a ballot that counts. Especially given the recent elimination of other federal election security supports and the growth of state-level bans on third-party funding for elections,<sup>29</sup> which together have left election officials with fewer resources despite growing workloads, significant and sustained Congressional appropriations are as urgent as they are necessary.

Our democracy also depends on public confidence in the voting process. In an environment in which some politicians are working overtime to cast doubt upon the integrity of our elections—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary<sup>30</sup>—and bad actors amplify any small failure during the voting process to cry “fraud,” smooth election administration is paramount. Well-considered support for election administration can quell conspiracy theories and ensure voters have a positive, confidence-inspiring experience, ultimately strengthening our fraying democratic fabric.

As the House and the Senate negotiate the FY27 government funding bill, we strongly urge you to send \$825 million in HAVA Election Security Grants, under existing HAVA grant restrictions and terms, to states and localities. Because the bulk of election administration happens at the local level in nearly every state, we 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 & Democracy 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  
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Advancement Project  
AFL-CIO  
AFT

All Voting is Local Action  
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees  
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIAVote)  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Black Voters Matter Fund  
Campaign Legal Center  
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)  
Clean Elections Texas  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
Common Cause  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Region  
Declaration for American Democracy Coalition  
Defend The Vote Action Fund  
Democracy Defenders Action  
Dēmos  
Eastside For All  
End Citizens United  
Equal Ground Action Fund  
Equal Ground Education Fund  
Everybody Votes Campaign  
Fair Count Inc  
Fair Elections Center  
Fair Fight Action  
FairVote Action  
Faithful Democracy  
Feminist Majority  
Florida Rising  
Fundlers' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)  
Georgia Coalition for the Peoples Agenda  
Georgia Equality  
Georgia Muslim Voter Project  
Interfaith Alliance  
Japanese American Citizens League  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
League of Conservation Voters  
League of Women Voters of the United States  
Mi Familia Vota  
Missouri Voter Protection Coalition  
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund  
NALEO Education Fund  
National Voter Corps  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Jewish Women

National Education Association  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)  
National Women's Law Center Action Fund  
Native American Rights Fund  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New Disabled South  
Nonprofit VOTE  
Open Democracy Action  
People Power United  
Protect Democracy  
Rock the Vote  
Secure Elections Network  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)  
Sojourners  
Southern Coalition for Social Justice  
Stand Up America  
State Voices Florida  
Texas Civil Rights Project  
The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
The Workers Circle  
Transparency International U.S.  
UnidosUS  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
United Church of Christ  
Verified Voting  
Voices for Progress  
Vote.org  
Voter Participation Center  
VoteRiders  
Voters Not Politicians  
Voto Latino  
YWCA USA

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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> 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>3</sup> Public Law No: 119-75, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/7148/text>.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Harper & Isabel Linzer, "Countdown to the Midterms: Mapping the Rapid Evolution of Election Security," Center for Democracy & Technology, February 13, 2026, <https://cdt.org/insights/countdown-to-the-midterms-mapping-the-rapid-evolution-of-election-security/>.

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- <sup>5</sup> “Threats and Harassment Dataset: August 2024 Update,” Bridging Divides Initiative, Princeton University, September 13, 2024, <https://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu/updates/2024/threats-and-harassment-dataset-august-2024-update>.
- <sup>6</sup> Thulasi Seshan and Zach Mahafza, *Under the Radar: Natural Disaster Risk & Election Administration*, Southern Poverty Law Center, November 10, 2025, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/reports/under-the-radar/>.
- <sup>7</sup> Darrell M. West, “How disinformation defined the 2024 election narrative,” Brookings, November 7, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-disinformation-defined-the-2024-election-narrative/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Brandon Tensley, “Why Voting is Becoming Harder for Black Americans in Southern States,” Capital B, August 26, 2025, <https://capitalbnews.org/black-voting-rights-threats-2025/>.
- <sup>9</sup> Benjamin Swasey, Camila Domonoske, and Ximena Bustillo, “Bomb threats were called in to polling places in multiple states; some counties extended hours,” NPR, November 5, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/05/g-s1-32626/georgia-hoax-bomb-threats-extended-hours>. See also “The Disproportionate Impact of Election Day Bomb Threats on Voters of Color in Georgia,” All Voting is Local, 2024, <https://allvotingislocal.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Disproportionate-Impact-of-Election-Day-Bomb-Threats-on-Voters-of-Color-2024-1.pdf>.
- <sup>10</sup> Kirk, Joseph. Bartow County Election Supervisor. Interview conducted by Thulasi Seshan on August 26th, 2025.
- <sup>11</sup> *Supra* note 4.
- <sup>12</sup> 52 U.S.C §20501
- <sup>13</sup> “Local Election Officials Survey — July 2025,” Brennan Center for Justice, July 10, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/local-election-officials-survey-july-2025>.
- <sup>14</sup> *Supra* note 5.
- <sup>15</sup> Kim Wehle, “‘We’re Going to Hang You’: Threats to Election Workers on the Rise,” The Bulwark, October 16, 2024, <https://www.thebulwark.com/p/going-to-hang-you-threats-to-election-officials-democracy>.
- <sup>16</sup> *Supra* note 13.
- <sup>17</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>18</sup> “State Voting Laws,” Brennan Center for Justice, <https://www.brennancenter.org/topics/voting-elections/voting-reform/state-voting-laws>.
- <sup>19</sup> Thulasi Seshan, *Georgia Must Stop Destabilizing County Election Administration*, Southern Poverty Law Center, March 16, 2026, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/reports/georgia-must-stop-destabilizing-county-election-administration/>.
- <sup>20</sup> *Supra* note 18. See also *A Decade-Long Erosion: The Impact of the Shelby County Decision on the Political Participation and Representation of Black People and Other People of Color in the Deep South*, Southern Poverty Law Center, June 21, 2023, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/reports/shelby-county-decision-report/> and *A More-Than Decade-Long Erosion: Update on the Impact of Shelby v. Holder in the Deep South*, Southern Poverty Law Center, August 5, 2024, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/stories/shelby-county-decision-impact/>.
- <sup>21</sup> *Supra* notes 8 and 20.
- <sup>22</sup> “Diverse Coalition Calls for \$825M in Federal Funding for Elections in FY26,” Southern Poverty Law Center, July 15, 2025, page 3, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/policies/diverse-coalition-calls-for-825m-in-federal-funding-for-elections-in-fy26/>.
- <sup>23</sup> Penny Gusner, “Natural Disaster Facts and Statistics,” Forbes, April 1, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/homeowners-insurance/natural-disaster-statistics/>.
- <sup>24</sup> *Emergency Costs in the 2024 Election*, Election Infrastructure Initiative, January 2025, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6083502fc0f6531f14d6e929/t/6797d44a1c6d4a0b5fa8b997/1738003533648/EII+Emergency+Costs+Report+FINAL+%281%29.pdf>.
- <sup>25</sup> Testimony of Karen Brinson Bell, former Executive Director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections, before the Committee on House Administration Subcommittee on Elections hearing entitled “Maintaining Election Operations in the Face of Natural Disasters, 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, September 16, 2025, page 68, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-119hrg61639/pdf/CHRG-119hrg61639.pdf>.
- <sup>26</sup> Curt Devine, Devan Cole, and Janat Batra, “Election officials in southern states are grappling with fallout from dual hurricanes,” CNN, October 12, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/12/politics/helene-milton-early-voting-north-carolina-florida-south-carolina>.
- <sup>27</sup> *Supra* note 24, page 18.
- <sup>28</sup> *Supra* note 25, page 69.

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<sup>29</sup> “Prohibiting Private Funding of Elections,” National Conference of State Legislatures, July 11, 2025, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/prohibiting-private-funding-of-elections>. See also “Restrictions on Private Funding for Elections,” The Center for Election Innovation & Research, August 2025, <https://electioninnovation.org/research/overview-of-private-funding-bans/>.

<sup>30</sup> “Understanding American Elections and Why They Are Trustworthy,” American Bar Association, [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/election\\_law/american-democracy/our-work/speaker-discussion-guides/understanding-american-elections-why-they-are-trustworthy/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/election_law/american-democracy/our-work/speaker-discussion-guides/understanding-american-elections-why-they-are-trustworthy/).