

The Resilient Elections During Quarantines and Natural Disasters Act of 2020

Unless Congress acts quickly, the novel coronavirus (“COVID-19”) has the potential to significantly disrupt the 2020 primaries and general elections. The virus will likely impact voters who cannot leave their homes, while possible large-scale quarantines, whether mandatory or self-imposed, at the recommendation of health experts, may also disrupt elections.

According to the Election Assistance Commission, **58% of all poll workers in 2018 were over 60**, the prime at-risk population for COVID-19.

The Resilient Elections During Quarantines and Natural Disasters Act of 2020 addresses the serious threat to our democracy posed by COVID-19 by requiring states and localities, within 30 days, to create and publish a plan to operate their elections in the event that large numbers of voters or poll workers have been subjected to a mandatory quarantine or a self-quarantine at the advice of government officials or health experts.

In the event that 25% of states declare an emergency related to COVID-19, another infectious disease, or a natural disaster, this act requires all states to:

- Offer all registered voters the ability to vote by absentee ballot. Currently, 34 states and Washington D.C. either allow any voter to request an absentee ballot or vote entirely by mail. However, 16 states still have restrictions on who can request an absentee ballot.
- Offer voters the ability to submit electronically a request for an absentee ballot rather than having to do so in person or with a paper form.
- Offer voters the choice of receiving their blank absentee ballot electronically to print at home and return by postal mail. Currently, print-at-home ballots are only offered to overseas and military voters.
- Accept absentee ballot requests up until 5 days before an election (for blank ballots sent to the voter by mail) and 1 day before the election (for electronic print-at-home ballots)
- Accept ballots that have been postmarked by election day - which will be important in the event that mail is delayed due to large numbers of postal workers being quarantined.

Even if the 25% threshold has not been met, the provisions of the act can be triggered within a state at the discretion of a governor by declaring a state of emergency. The provisions of this act will apply to all federal elections held until 180 days after states declare that the emergency has ended.

The act also requires all states to offer postage prepaid self-sealing envelopes to voters who vote absentee in order to reduce the risk associated with infection at post offices, and provides \$500 million in grants to states to cover the cost of postage and for high-speed scanners necessary to process large numbers of absentee ballots.