



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

1335 EAST-WEST HIGHWAY, SUITE 4300

SILVER SPRING, MD 20910

**U.S. Committee on House Administration  
Voting Rights and Election Administration:  
Combatting Misinformation in the 2020 Election**

**Benjamin Hovland, Chairman  
United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC)  
October 6, 2020**

Good afternoon Chairperson Fudge, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's ongoing work and this important issue. Combatting misinformation and disinformation was one of the expected issues of the 2020 election and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the risk.

Following the 2016 foreign interference in our elections, there has been an increased focus and dedication to the security of our elections. The Department of Homeland Security's designation of election infrastructure as critical infrastructure has helped to fortify and coordinate efforts between federal, state and local government agencies, as well as with industry. This has led to a sea change in information sharing, and coupled with Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grant funding, has greatly improved the security posture of our elections. While that commitment to securing our elections has continued, it is impossible to discuss the 2020 election without acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since March, amid the ongoing debates about the health of our communities and our economy, election administrators have faced the difficult task of determining how to best adapt their practices and procedures to conduct safe, secure, accessible and accurate elections. At the EAC, we have pivoted substantially to focus our attention on how we can support state and local election officials as they make these tough decisions. The EAC has also distributed almost \$1.2 billion in grant funding to states since 2018, including \$400 million in recent CARES Act funds and additional election security funds authorized under HAVA. These revenue sources have proven vital to improving election administration and addressing COVID-19 related issues.

The EAC is working tirelessly to meet the wide-ranging needs of both election officials and voters during this crisis. The increase in the EAC Fiscal Year 2020 budget has allowed us to bolster existing programs and develop new services, such as a cybersecurity division and hiring of more than 20 experienced staff. Through developing guidance, conducting public forums, and collaborating with federal partners, we continue to assist state and local officials to help America vote safely.



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Election administrators have risen to the challenge during these difficult times. The public servants that administer elections can only do their best when it comes to limiting the impact of widespread misinformation and disinformation about our elections. Political campaigns and interest groups are spending billions of dollars to influence Americans. Foreign adversaries are amplifying our divisions and mimicking traditional voter suppression tactics to dissuade participation or provide inaccurate information about how voters can participate.

In the face of that, Americans must come together to protect our nation, the electoral process, and voter confidence. Those who can should help encourage Americans' confidence in our electoral process by highlighting the great work of our election officials. Additionally, supporting efforts like the National Association of Secretaries of State driven #TrustedInfo2020 campaign are an integral part of ensuring Americans get the right information on how to participate this year.

Today, we are 28 days from Election Day. Military and overseas citizen (UOCAVA) ballots have been sent out across the country and around the world. A number of states have begun early voting, and some registration deadlines have already passed.

The most important things we can focus on at this point are the basics – serving voters well and helping them to have a positive experience whether they vote by mail or absentee ballot, early in-person or on Election Day. Misinformation or disinformation can interfere with that.

We must push back not only against this intentionally misleading disinformation, but also misinformation that may be well-intended or appropriate for citizens in one state or jurisdiction, but not another. In the DC area, for example, voters are registered in one of two states or the District. Of course social media does not stop at the state line.

The reality is, the 50 states each run elections in their own unique way. The #TrustedInfo2020 effort, that I mentioned earlier, is about helping Americans get accurate information about election administration from their state and local election officials. This is the trusted source for each voter, which provides the correct information on how to participate.

With all of the noise that surrounds this election, it is crucial that we encourage individuals to think through how they plan to vote and drive them to trusted source information. Most Americans have the option to vote by mail, or absentee ballot, early in-person, or on Election Day. We know from the Centers for Disease Control that limiting congestion in polling places will help keep voting as safe as possible. Helping Americans get accurate information about their voting options and how they can participate this year ensures that voters have opportunities to vote on or before Election Day.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.