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July 21, 2020

U.S. Senate
Committee on Rules & Administration
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the NEA, who teach and support students in schools and on college campuses in each of our nation's congressional districts, thank you for holding the July 22 hearing, "2020 General Election Preparations." We applaud this committee for highlighting the importance of creating the conditions for fair elections and for providing the opportunity for the NEA to submit these comments for the record.

NEA members teach that democracy depends on the principle of "one person, one vote," yet our primaries since the onset of COVID-19 have shown that this foundational premise is at risk. During the primaries, we have seen many voters risk their health and safety to exercise their right to vote. They will stand in line for hours and even forfeit a day's pay if they must. But citizens should not be forced to do either of these in the United States of America, which has monitored elections around the world to ensure citizens of other nations fair and free access to the polls.

Voting methods should enhance participation, and this means expanding early in-person voting; vote-by-mail options; online voter registration; and voter education programs to inform communities of new practices, including changes in voting locations. In addition, poll workers must be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep themselves and others safe. According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, more than 50 percent of poll workers in 2016 were 61 or older—the demographic most seriously affected by COVID-19—making the availability of PPE especially important.

NEA members supported provisions in the CARES to protect voting rights during this pandemic. We also support Sen. Amy Klobuchar's Register America to Vote Act, which would authorize a grant program to ensure every state implements a process for automatically registering citizens to vote once they turn 18, and also would direct states to allow voters who have been automatically registered (or were registered previously) to update their address through the day of the election. Another bill introduced by Senator Klobuchar would expand voting by mail and require states to have polls open for 20 days, leading to less crowding and shorter lines at polling places.

The VoteSafe Act, introduced by Sen. Kamala Harris, would expand voting options and improve the safety and accessibility of polling places by authorizing \$5 billion to expand voting by mail and early voting and requiring states to permit no-excuse absentee voting, in addition to maintaining an early voting period of at least 20 days. The bill also implements curbside voting,

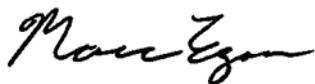
improves access to voter registration, and provides for more training and recruitment of poll workers.

We encourage members of this committee to consider these and other excellent ideas for broadening access to voting, including those in the HEROES Act, which takes steps such as: providing \$3.6 billion for states to protect voters' access to the polls; requiring 15 days of early voting, with a minimum of 10 hours each day; allowing voting with a sworn written statement rather than an ID; making absentee vote by mail available to all voters; and allowing absentee ballots to be returned to drop boxes, polling places, tribally designated buildings, or election offices.

Across America, we have seen citizens rise up to protest the deaths in Black and brown communities of citizens at the hands of police. At a time of so much hardship, distress, and frustration, people need *more* access to the vote—not less—to make their voices heard. We must do more to protect the most sacred privilege we have as Americans, regardless of our color, ethnicity, religion or spiritual practices, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status: the right to express our deepest values and beliefs on Election Day.

As the late Congressman John Lewis said in honor of the 54th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act last year: “We have come a great distance, and each of us must confirm in ourselves that we are not going back. We want to move forward to create a more fair and open society that gives an equal voice to every citizen.” We can only accomplish this through protecting the right to vote and expanding the mechanisms through which we vote. Thank you again for holding this hearing on preparing for the 2020 General Election.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Egan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marc" being more prominent than the last name "Egan".

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association