

Voting During the Pandemic: Temporarily Expanding Absentee Voting Will Protect Tennessee Voters

Across the country and here in Tennessee, election officials are working to keep voters safe from COVID-19. But today, our state is one of just a handful that will require most voters to appear in person to cast a ballot.

Voters want the freedom to decide the method of voting that works best for them and their families. Some voters in Tennessee, like those who are 60 and older, already get to make that choice.

Temporarily expanding absentee voting to all Tennessee voters would build on the system we already have. It is a commonsense solution that will give voters the options they deserve.

Most States Already Allow Every Voter to Cast an Absentee Ballot in Every Election.

In two-thirds of states, any registered voter can vote absentee for any reason in every election. Voters in Tennessee and 15 other states must provide a qualifying excuse. But nearly all of these states have now taken steps to waive the excuse requirement during the pandemic.

Kentucky, West Virginia and Alabama, for example, have temporarily waived the excuse requirement or included concerns about the coronavirus as a valid excuse. Currently, fear of becoming ill -- or of making others ill -- due to the coronavirus is not a qualifying excuse to vote absentee in Tennessee.



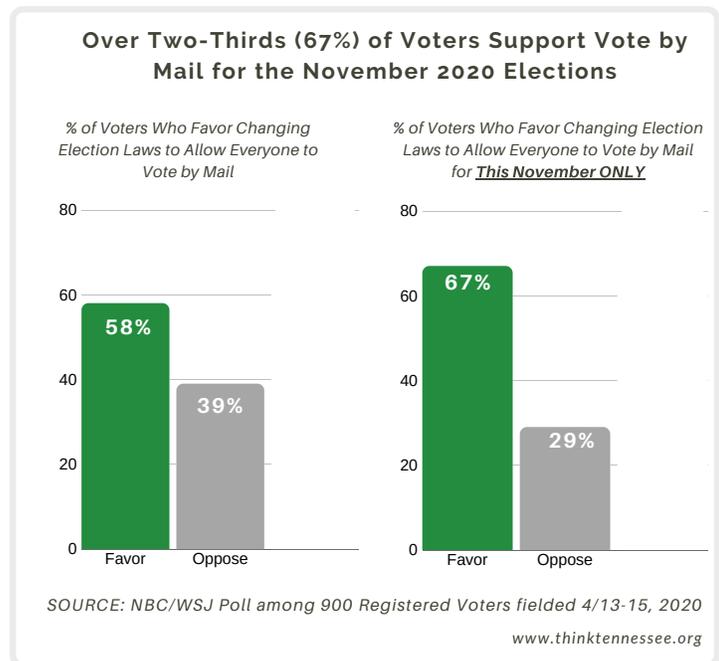
Voters Across the Political Spectrum Want a Choice Between Voting Absentee or in Person.

Nationally, 67% of voters favor temporarily changing election laws to allow everyone to vote absentee this November.

In Tennessee, even if an at-risk voter is able to vote absentee, a member of her household may not be. Nationally, over half of voters say they live in a household with someone at increased risk for complications or death from the coronavirus.

57% of voters say someone living in their household has asthma, cancer, chronic lung disease, diabetes, heart disease or a weakened immune system

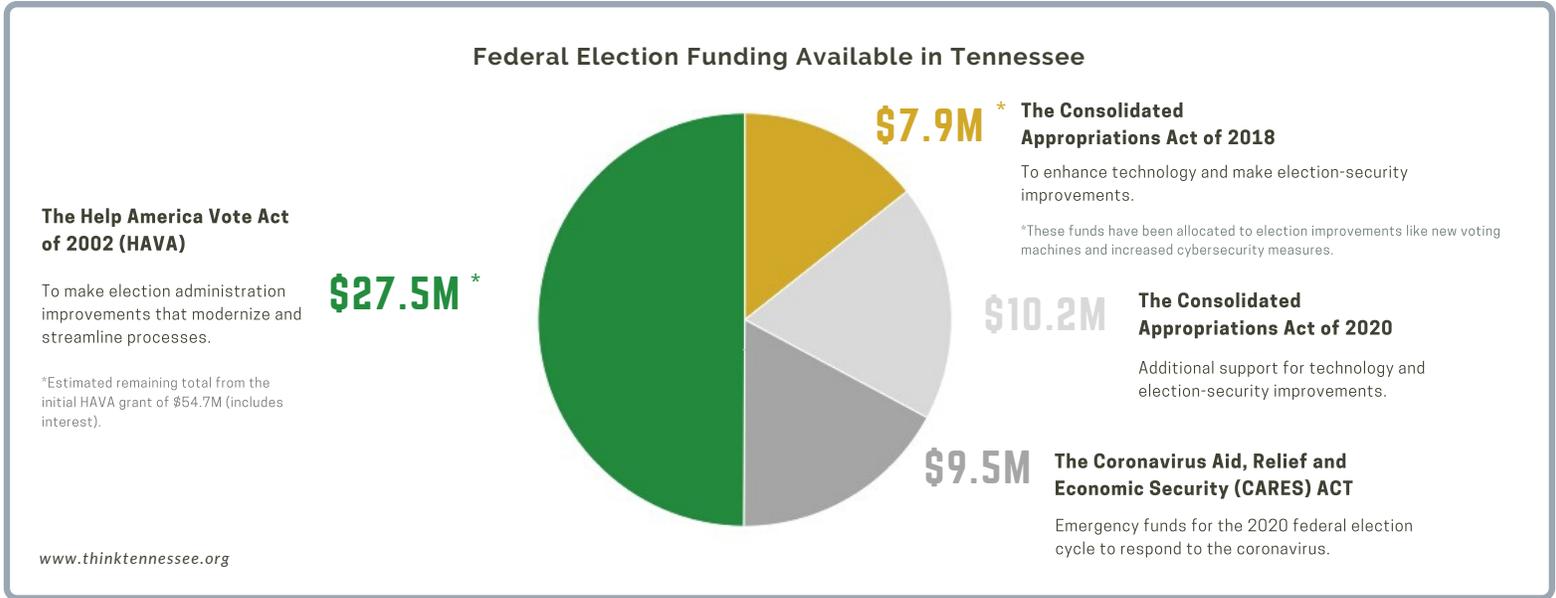
SOURCE: NBC/WSJ Poll among 900 Registered Voters fielded 4/13-15, 2020
www.thinktennessee.org



Tennessee Has up to \$55 Million in Federal Election Funding That Can Be Used on Absentee Voting.

Up to \$55 million in federal funding is available to make new investments in Tennessee elections.

This funding includes \$9.5 million in new coronavirus emergency response funds, another \$10.2 million from earlier this year and \$35.4 million remaining from previous federal grants. The previous grants were originally intended for other election-related investments but can be used to support pandemic-related needs.



Temporarily Expanding Absentee Voting Would Cost Tennessee Only a Portion of the Funding We Have.

With our elections just months away, some election upgrades may be out of reach. But our state has the time and the funding to make basic investments. Some of these purchases, like new ballot-sorting machines, could also help streamline future elections.

These investments would cost about \$19.2 million, far less than the approximately \$55 million in federal funding Tennessee currently has available to spend on pandemic-related upgrades and other election needs.

