

# Ensuring Candidate Safety

Examining the Need for Legislation to Protect Elected Officials and Campaign Workers

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## Examining the Need for Legislation to Protect Elected Officials and Campaign Workers

Recently, discussions about election issues have focused on topics such as electoral fairness, security, and accountability of elected officials. However, a crucial aspect that is often overlooked is the physical safety of candidates, elected officials, and the campaign workers who support them.

This report delves into the evolving landscape of candidate security and explores the necessity of legislative measures to safeguard not only elected officials, but also, those engaged in campaign activities. In light of recent incidents, legislative efforts, and the broader implications of violent threats undermining our elections, enacting comprehensive legislation to ensure the safety of all those involved in the democratic process is overdue.

The current electoral landscape holds a myriad of challenges, with an increasing emphasis on election integrity, fairness, and accountability. Yet, the security and safety of candidates, elected officials, and campaign workers remain an understudied - and often disregarded - facet of the electoral process.



## Campaign Worker Security Concerns

Traditional campaign practices, such as door-to-door canvassing, have undergone significant changes due to evolving security concerns. While canvassing was once an integral part of engaging with voters, we have witnessed a shift in recent years with candidate behavior, moving to more texting, online, and virtual connections with voters. Some candidates are avoiding interactions in person, especially canvassing at voters' homes, due to fears of violence and security threats. Notable incidents of campaign workers being harmed, such as the shootings of canvassers in [Pennsylvania](#) and [Georgia](#), emphasize the urgency of ensuring sufficient legal protections for those engaged in this core First Amendment activity. When it comes down to it, face to face interactions with voters are oftentimes the best way to lower tensions, but many candidates have limited their campaign time going door-to-door out of fear for both their volunteers and their own safety.



# Campaign Finance Laws and Security Provisions

Although most states allow campaign funds to be used for activities “reasonably related” to campaign efforts, security remains conspicuously absent from these provisions. Since 2020, a small number of states have attempted to introduce candidate security provisions, but many have encountered challenges in passing such legislation. Notably, [Minnesota](#) and [West Virginia](#) have seen bills introduced to include security measures in their campaign finance statutes, but these have so far been unsuccessful.

California stands out as a model for legislative action on this subject, with the state House [passing a bill](#) that addresses candidate security within campaign finance regulations, at least in one chamber. The bill now is awaiting final approval by the Senate. The bill summary states:

**Authorizes a candidate or elected officer to use campaign funds to pay or reimburse the State for the reasonable costs of installing and monitoring a home or office electronic security system, and for the reasonable costs of providing personal security to a candidate, elected officer, or the immediate family and staff of a candidate or elected officer, if those costs are directly related to a political, legislative, or governmental purpose.**

All states should take the opportunity to codify that the security of their public servants is made easier and more ubiquitous by allowing candidates to use their campaign dollars for this purpose.



## Elected Official Experiences

Candidate security is often not prioritized, even as incidents of violence and threats against elected officials continue to emerge, even for officials far removed from national politics. Most recently, we can examine the experience of two state legislators who changed their political affiliation while serving in office. North Carolina Representative Tricia Cotham and Georgia Representative Mesha Mainor, have both faced threats, backlash, and vandalism due to their political affiliations.

**Mainor addressed how some of the hate mail addressed the color of her skin, to which she replied, “This is just an example of some people in a Democratic Party that are showing their true colors when it comes to supporting minorities. And another reason why I’m happy to be [with the Republicans](#).”**

**“Harassing and targeting my family is WRONG,” Cotham wrote, referring to a social media post targeting her children that read ‘Tricia Cotham’s children deserve to know she is a liar’ was “just another example of the evil behavior we endure.” [Cotham then added](#): “In a separate matter, my mother and son were targeted in an aggressive incident of political road rage this week. My child was screamed at with vulgar obscenities, received the middle finger from a raging woman, who would not stop honking her Toyota’s horn, while she was swerving at them. She tried to run my family off the road and get them to hit her.”**

The term “political violence” often conjures images of large-scale rallies or high-profile incidents, overshadowing the subtle, yet impactful, threats faced by local elected officials and campaign workers. The reality is that addressing the security of all individuals engaged in the democratic process is a concern for candidates up and down the ballot, from local to national offices, regardless of their position on the political spectrum.



## Conclusion

As discussions surrounding elections, accountability, and fairness continue, it is imperative to remember that the safety of candidates, elected officials, and campaign workers should not be overlooked. The experiences of individuals like Representatives Tricia Cotham and Mesha Mainor highlight the vulnerabilities elected officials face without the benefit of utilizing campaign funds to keep them safe. Comprehensive state legislation that explicitly addresses candidate security is the pathway to safeguarding the democratic ideals that the American Dream represents.

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