

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

1309 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515-6157

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www.house.gov/cha

April 14, 2008

Mr. Christopher Coates
Acting Chief, Voting Section, Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Mr. Coates:

We write to inquire regarding the status of the Department of Justice's investigation of states' compliance with Section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act. As you are aware, Section 7 requires all states to provide voter registration services at public assistance agencies or state funded programs that provide assistance to people with disabilities—including food stamps, Medicaid, and Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC). We wish to know what actions the Department of Justice has taken to enforce this provision.

The Committee on House Administration Subcommittee on Elections held a hearing on states' compliance with Section 7 on April 1, 2008, and was dismayed at the reports of noncompliance. Nationwide, voter registrations generated from public agencies have declined 79% since 1995. Nine states have reported a 90% or greater decrease in voter registration applications received from public assistance agencies since 1995. As a result of states' noncompliance, millions of low-income citizens have been denied an opportunity to register to vote, and a significant gap remains between the registration rates of high-income and low-income individuals. In 2006, 40% of eligible voters from households earning less than \$25,000 were registered, compared to 20% of eligible voters in households making more than \$100,000.

Lack of enforcement by the Department of Justice is exacerbating the problem. In the past six years, your office has initiated only one Section 7 enforcement action, despite mounting evidence that states are not in compliance. On August 31, 2007, former Voting Section Chief John Tanner sent letters of inquiry regarding Section 7 compliance to eighteen states; yet since then no further action appears to have been taken. Moreover, the Department did not issue letters of inquiry to Florida, Texas and Virginia, despite the fact that they rank near the bottom of states that are processing voter registrations from public assistance agencies.

The Subcommittee requests that the Department provide a detailed report as to the efforts made to enforce Section 7 of the NVRA and its plans for future inquiry and enforcement, in anticipation of subsequent hearings on the matter. I look forward to your written response to the Subcommittee. If you have any questions please contact me or Thomas Hicks, Senior Elections Counsel for the Committee on House Administration, at 202-225-2061.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zoe Lofgren", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Zoe Lofgren
Chair, Subcommittee on Elections

