



TESTIMONY REGARDING S.B. 600
FLORIDA STATE SENATE
ETHICS AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 18, 2013

Project Vote appreciates this opportunity to express its opinions regarding S.B. 600. While Project Vote acknowledges that this bill takes some positive steps, it does not go far enough to eliminate barriers to voting, and in some respects creates additional barriers. Regarding early voting, the bill leaves too much to be decided by election supervisors: although it helps good election administrators to improve early voting, it does little to require improvement where it is needed most.

Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in historically underrepresented communities. Project Vote takes a leadership role in nationwide voting rights and election administration issues, working through research, litigation, and advocacy to ensure constituencies can register, vote, and cast ballots that count.

Restoration of Permanent Portable Registration

S.B. 600 fails to restore Florida's portable registration repealed by H.B. 1355 (2011). Currently, because of amendments to the election law in 2011, voters who moved to a new county must update their registration when they move or they are required to vote a provisional ballot. Portable registration in Florida previously allowed any already-registered, eligible voter who moved to a new county in Florida to vote a regular ballot on Election Day as long as he or she remained eligible, regardless of whether the voter had already submitted an address update to the new county. Portable registration is a significant issue because hundreds of thousands of Floridians move to a new county within Florida every year.¹ Floridians' mobility threatens otherwise-eligible voters' ability to cast ballots that count under the current statute.

- *Lines move faster when voters cast a regular ballot.* Currently, voters who move to a different county and do not update their addresses ahead of time must vote provisionally. The paperwork and assistance required to complete a provisional ballot slows down lines at the polls.
- *Cutting the number of provisional ballots would save election officials time and money.* If voters who moved counties could cast regular ballots, election officials would save the resources currently needed to process their provisional ballots.

¹ See United States Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey, Factfinder, Geographical Mobility In The Past Year By Age For Current Residence In The United States, Florida.

- *Re-implementing portable registration would be simple.* An election official would merely access Florida’s statewide voter registration database to confirm that the voter is already registered in the state. Once the voter fills out an affidavit with his new address, the voter votes a regular ballot.

Early Voting Hours

In 2011, this legislature restricted early voting, reducing the days it could be offered from fourteen to eight, including disallowing use of the Sunday before Election Day for early voting, and reducing the minimum number of early voting hours that must be offered from 96 to only 48. Although this bill moves back in a positive direction by adding two hours of required early voting per day when it is offered (for a total of 64 minimum required hours, still less than the previous 96), it does not go far enough in several respects. Most significantly, although the bill restores supervisors’ ability to provide early voting on the 15th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 11th or 2nd day before an election, it does not actually require election officials to make any of these days available to voters. Therefore, voters’ opportunity to vote is dependent on the particular supervisor.

- The ability to vote early should not depend on the county in which a voter lives.
- Widely available weekend hours are particularly important to voters with childcare needs and/or inflexible work schedules.
- After the reduction in early voting in 2012, longer lines during the remaining days and decreased turnout were observed.

Early Voting Locations

S.B. 600 does allow election administrators who want to designate additional early voting sites to do so, but it does not require such action. The bill provides supervisor discretion to choose a single early voting site that is not within the designated types, if the supervisor would otherwise be “unable to provide an early voting site in an area of the county due to the nonexistence of any of the designated locations.” However, this does not allow the supervisors sufficient ability to designate sites if large populations live in areas without these buildings. This is especially problematic in areas of new development. The legislature should do more to ensure that all eligible voters have an equal opportunity to take advantage of early voting regardless of whether they live near government buildings or other designated facilities, for example by removing the limit on the number of additional sites the supervisor may select in addition to those designated by statute.

Submission of Absentee Ballots

S.B. 600 adds a significant and problematic new requirement that a voter wishing to vote absentee must have a witness sign his ballot. This requirement will make it harder to vote absentee, particularly for individuals who live alone, such as seniors, homebound individuals, and single parents. This could present a significant barrier to individuals with difficult work schedules and childcare needs. This requirement should be removed from the bill.