

RE: HB2093, HB2372 and HB2848

April 8, 2013

Dear Members of the Texas House Elections Committee:

We the undersigned organizations are committed to ensuring that every eligible voter in Texas has a full and equal opportunity to participate in the election process. Today you will be considering several bills in your chamber (HB2093, HB2372 and HB2848) that we feel limit and discourage participation in the voting process.

HB 2093, introduced by Representative Harless, would roll back access to early voting from 12 days to 6 days with an optional Sunday. In 2011, Florida experimented with reducing its early voting days from 14 to 8. The results were long lines and frustration of voters and election workers, which again subjected Florida to widespread media criticism. Texas should learn from Florida's mistake and not reduce its popular early voting program. The percentage of voters who use early voting has increased with each election. Fifty percent of voters cast their ballot in the early voting period in 2004, over 66% in 2008 and over 63% in 2012. Early voting has existed in Texas since 1987 and is a system that works here. There is no reason to fix a system that is not broken.

HB 2372, introduced by Representative Klick, would establish an interstate voter registration crosscheck program. While this sounds like a good idea in theory, technology has not matured to a point where this program could be done without improperly removing otherwise eligible voters. This bill does not specify with which state(s) Texas would be cooperating, what data fields would be used to generate a match, or what, if any, security protocols would be put in place to protect the integrity of the data provided to other states. In 2012, Texas's experience comparing registration data to another database was a failure. Texas attempted to compare registration data to the Social Security Administration death records. This led to thousands of letters notifying live voters that they were presumed dead, based on criteria that the Texas Secretary of State specifically said were weak.

HB 2848, Introduced by Representative White, would allow for video monitoring of voters at early voting locations. Voting is a private act and should be respected as such. Videotaping voters creates a public record that could be abused by some and used to intimidate and discourage voting in the future. Americans have a long held expectation that voting is a confidential and personal act. The idea of videotaping any part of that process violates that expectation.

Videotaping voters may also be a violation of federal law because it could be considered a form of intimidation and coercion. The Department of Justice has stated previously that videotaping voters without their permission may violate the Voting Rights Act (VRA). Texas should not continue to be in the forefront of VRA violations.

In conclusion, we thank you for taking the time to consider our concerns on the three elections-related bills you will be reviewing today. As organizations that work to educate and engage Texans to participate in the democratic process, we hope you will take our concerns seriously and vote against passing these bills out of committee. Please feel free to reach out to the representative listed below if you have any questions or would like to connect with any of the organizations listed below.

Sincerely,

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ACLU of Texas

A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI)

Common Cause Texas

Dallas Peace Center

Demos

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Entity

Environment Texas

Esperanza Peace and Justice Center

Hispanic Institute

Houston, Texas Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations

La Union del Pueblo Entero

Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Mi Familia Vota

NAACP- Dallas

NARAL Pro-Choice Texas

National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP)

National Council of Jewish Women Texas State Policy Advocates

Progress Texas

Project Vote

Public Citizen

Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network

SEIU

Sierra Club- Lone Star Chapter

Southwest Workers Union

Texans Together Education Fund

Texas AFL-CIO

Texas AFT

Texas League of Conservation Voters

Texas Organizing Project

Texas Research Institute

Texas State Teachers Association