

May 1, 2008**To:** Interested Parties**From:** Jody Herman**CC:** Michael Slater**Re: NVRA Public Agency Registration (Section 7) Field Research Results**

Section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) requires government programs assisting the poor and disabled (such as Food Stamps, TANF, WIC, Medicaid, and disability services programs) to offer voter registration services to their clients when they apply for benefits, recertify their application for benefits, and change their name or address. This memo reviews data collected through Project Vote's surveys of public assistance offices assessing their compliance with Section 7 of the NVRA. Overall, the surveys demonstrated widespread failure to comply with the public assistance agency provisions of Section 7 of the NVRA.

From December 2006 through December 2007 staff members from state chapters of the community organization ACORN completed surveys of sixty-three public assistance offices in the following seven states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Missouri, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington. Surveyors inspected the offices and spoke with staff members to see if they were providing voter registration services and providing the services in the manner specified in the NVRA. Surveyors also interviewed individual clients as they left these offices to see if they had been offered the required services.

Table 1 displays the results of the sixty-three office surveys. Surveyors found fifteen offices (24 percent) had voter registrations available in the waiting area. When surveyors asked staff members for a voter registration application, only forty-one offices (65 percent) could produce an application. Only twenty offices (32 percent) reported that they automatically provide voter registration applications to clients when required to by the NVRA. In short, common problems reported by the surveyors include offices not having adequate voter registration supplies, a disorganized approach to voter registration services, and a lack of understanding of the law.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the individual client surveys conducted at these offices. Surveyors interviewed individual clients as they left the public assistance offices. In order to be interviewed, clients had to respond affirmatively to a question that they were at the office for NVRA-covered services, which include applying for benefits, recertifying their benefit application, and changing their name or address. Of the four hundred nineteen individual clients surveyed, only seventy-four (18 percent) received any voter registration services.

Surveyed clients who met with a caseworker at the public assistance office revealed that the caseworker rarely offered them voter registration services. In the surveyed group, one hundred ninety-one clients met with a caseworker that day. Only twenty-two (less than 12 percent) were offered voter registration by that caseworker.

It is worth noting that a comparison of office surveys to client surveys reveals the occasional disparity between the voter registration services agency staff claim to provide and the services clients report receiving. In Arizona, for example, nine offices reported that they automatically provide voter registration forms to public assistance applicants, yet only four of the twenty-four clients surveyed at those same offices reported an offer of voter registration services.

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Survey data from interviews with public assistance agency staff and clients indicate that seven states are not complying with the requirements of Section 7 of the NVRA. The evidence from these surveys makes it clear that noncompliance is a pervasive problem. In light of additional evidence of non-compliance with the NVRA, it is clear that poor management of the voting rights of public assistance clients is the leading contributor to the dramatic decline in the number of voter registrations originating from state public assistance agencies in recent years.¹

¹For thorough review of the additional evidence of non-compliance with Section 7 of the NVRA, see Douglas R. Hess and Scott Novakowski's *Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007*, February 2008, available at <http://www.projectvote.org>.

Table 1: National Voter Registration Act Section 7 Compliance Field Surveys – Office Surveys

State	Number Offices Surveyed	Applications in Waiting Area	Forms Available Upon Request	Forms Provided to Applicants
Arizona	14	1	8	9 ^a
Colorado	8	4	3	3
Florida	6	1	2	5
Missouri	14	1	9	0
New Mexico	9	2	9	0
Oregon	6	5	6	1
Washington	6	1	4	2
TOTALS	63	15	41	20
PERCENT OF TOTAL	100%	24%	65%	32%

^a No answer to this question provided for two offices.

Table 2: National Voter Registration Act Section 7 Compliance Field Surveys – Client Surveys

State	# Clients Surveyed	# Clients with VR contact of any sort ^a	# Clients with VR contact by staff ^b	# Clients with VR contact on any form ^c
Arizona	89	11	7	4
Colorado	30	6	1	5
Florida	49	24	12	18
Missouri	56	4	3	4
New Mexico	51	1	0	1
Oregon	48	13	2	12
Washington	96	15	7	13
TOTALS	419	74	32	57
PERCENT OF TOTAL	100%	18%	8%	14%

^aTotal number of clients who had a VR question from a staff member, on any application or form, and/or were offered voter registration application at any time during visit.

^bTotal number of clients who had a VR question or offer of voter registration by any staff member.

^cTotal number of clients who had a VR question included on any form.

NOTE: The last two columns may not add up to the total number of clients who had a voter registration contact of any sort. Some clients may have been offered voter registration by a staff member and on a form. The total number of clients who had a voter registration contact of any sort eliminates the double-counting of those clients.



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