



March 29, 2022

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
 The Capitol
 400 S. Monroe St.
 Tallahassee, FL 32399

Re: SB 524: Election Administration Veto Request

Governor DeSantis,

As Florida’s largest coalition of civic engagement organizations, we are focused on ensuring that elections are free, fair, and accessible to all voters. The Florida Legislature recently passed Senate Bill 524, which is now before you for consideration. We strongly urge you to veto this dangerously anti-democratic and anti-voter bill that would do widespread harm to Florida’s elections.

We are primarily concerned about the following provisions:

- Proponents of SB 524 failed to produce any compelling evidence that warrants the costly creation of an Office of Election Crimes and Security. Moreover, the message this office's creation sends – that voting in Florida elections is somehow criminally suspect – has the potential to intimidate voters and discourage them from participating in the political process. Taxpayer dollars would be better spent improving access to the ballot and making the voting process more efficient.
- Reporting requirements for the Office of Election Crimes and Security lack critical transparency by failing to include the number of unsubstantiated claims or the sources of such claims. A high number of reported claims – even if the vast majority are entirely frivolous and do not merit investigation – will fuel misinformation relating to the office's efficacy and the security of our elections.
- Raising the cap on annual aggregate fines dramatically from \$1,000 to \$50,000 for third-party voter registration groups will have a chilling effect. These fines will discourage smaller localized groups deeply rooted in their communities from running programs altogether. They will make it much harder for communities of color, seniors, and persons with disabilities that often depend on these groups to exercise their fundamental right to vote.
- Additional list maintenance requirements with no safeguards will impose significant election administrative costs borne by the counties with no additional funding provided by the state. These processes are also duplicative of Florida's current list maintenance system via ERIC, which generally works well. In addition, the use of Department of Highway, Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) non-citizen data will likely create barriers for many voters. Attempts by Gov. Rick Scott to use DHSMV data for list maintenance in 2012 led to thousands of voters being wrongly identified for removal from the Florida Voter Registration System due to seriously flawed data and implementation. That effort was blocked by a federal appeals court due to it violating the NVRA.
- The reclassification of election-related misdemeanors to felonies is excessive. For instance, assisting voters with vote-by-mail ballots would be further criminalized with harsh penalties. A pastor or neighbor who helps a voter without an intent to violate the limitations currently in law should not face a felony and the loss of their civil rights. Sponsors refused to add language to the bill, which would have required prosecutors to establish intent.

Throughout this legislative session, SB 524's proponents showed a disturbing lack of respect for the fundamental rights it threatens. While focusing on measures restricting their constituents' freedom to vote, the Legislature rejected many changes that would have expanded access and made voting more accessible for all Floridians. For example, allowing voters to register up to Election Day, giving Supervisors of Elections more flexibility on early voting site locations, and modernizing registration to get eligible Floridians on the voter rolls automatically. We stand ready to collaborate with you and your administration on efforts such as these.

As you have acknowledged, Florida elections are safe and secure. Election officials and the Florida Secretary of State agree. The provisions in this bill undermine our democracy and are unnecessary. On behalf of Florida citizens, we ask that you stand up for free, fair, and accessible elections and veto SB 524. We are happy to answer any questions you and your staff may have.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Florida
Advancement Project
AFL-CIO Florida
All Voting is Local
Alianza for Progress
Bend The Arc, South Florida
Black Voters Matter
Campaign Legal Center
Chispa Florida
Common Cause Florida
Democracy For All
Disability Rights Florida
Equal Ground Action Fund
Faith in Florida
Florida Alliance for Retired Americans
Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy
Florida Conservation Voters
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Florida Rising
Hispanic Federation
Hope Community Center
League of Women Voters
Legal Defense Fund
NAACP Florida State Conference
Mi Familia Vota
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
PoderLatinX
Progress FL
SEIU FL
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