



Thursday, March 21, 2024

Dear Members of the House & Governmental Affairs Committee:

The League of Women Voters of Louisiana writes to **OPPOSE** the following bills scheduled on the agenda of the House & Governmental Affairs Committee of the Louisiana Legislature for hearing at its meeting on Thursday, March 21, 2024. We write separately about HB506 in another letter.

HB90 (Beaulieu) ELECTIONS: Provides relative to federal election guidance and funding

The League has opposed this bill for multiple years. We support federal voting rights and election legislation, such as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and we support national standards and, where appropriate, national funding for elections.

HB 114 (Farnum) VOTING/REGISTRATION: Provides for a supplemental annual canvass of registered voters

The League has opposed this bill for multiple years. The League was instrumental in passage of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and its provisions against voter purges. Having an additional canvass besides the annual canvass for purposes of voter list is costly and unnecessary and increases the likelihood of unwarranted removal of voters from the rolls.

Voters should not be punished with removal from the rolls for not voting or not properly engaging with their ROV. In fact, the postal mail notification process that sufficed when the NVRA was passed needs updating to reflect that postal mail is not an effective means of confirming residential addresses of mobile populations--especially with Louisiana's many weather disasters and particularly when change of address frequently triggers voter purging.

An additional annual canvass by mail is likely a poor investment, given these difficulties in receiving postal mail that many Louisianans encounter. If the state finds current methods of voter list maintenance to be insufficient, it should seek more innovative and timely methods of address confirmation. It might also consider rejoining ERIC.

HB483 (Thomas) ELECTIONS/COMMISSIONERS: Provides relative to qualifications of early voting election commissioners.

Prohibits a person who is required to register as a sex offender or child predator from serving as an early voting commissioner. Much like the recent library bills trade on public fears about crime, particularly the potential for crime against children, to support censorship problems, this bill trades on the same fears to limit a fundamental right—in this case, the right to vote.

Our polling places are currently understaffed in ways that threaten the orderly process of elections. Louisiana is fortunate to have been able to withstand these threats and has conducted exemplary, orderly, and fraud-free elections to date. But the pool of poll commissioners has been decimated by ongoing fear and uncertainty from the COVID pandemic and the aging out of a generation of poll commissioners who have dedicated many hours and days to staffing our elections.

Voting is an activity for adults. While some parents may bring their children to the polls to instill a sense of the value of voting, they are likely to and will likely be asked by poll commissioners to always keep their children with them. So, it is hard to see how the conduct of an activity for adults would be attractive to child sex offenders or risk harm to children. The supposed attraction of sex offenders specifically to early voting is equally hard to comprehend.

Even for sex offenders who have targeted adults, our criminal justice system—if it is to be just at all—is ideally premised on rehabilitation and the idea that once people have served the sentence for their crime, they should be given the opportunity to reenter society as fully rehabilitated citizens. This can validly include serving as poll commissioners, including early voting.

While impossible to know fully, it seems that this bill, premised as it is on a tenuous connection between sexual offenders (particularly child sexual offenders) and elections, seems mostly designed to reduce the number of people eligible to serve as poll commissioners at early voting at a time when early voting is becoming more popular in Louisiana, thereby threatening our elections and their integrity by deterring people who have served the sentences from performing the civic services of staffing our elections as poll commissioners.

HB581 (Thomas) ELECTIONS: Provides requirements and restrictions on the ability to witness election documents

Louisiana has been losing population in recent years, particularly among its younger population, but with many elderly retirees and disabled people left behind. Elders, retirees, and disabled people without family in-state find it difficult to find people to assist them with completion, witnessing, and delivery of their absentee mail ballots. If an elderly couple with no family in state are housebound, would they have to get two different non-family members to assist them in witnessing their ballots? Could retirees who live in communities or residential buildings that are not within the nursing home program not have a building manager or janitor witness their ballots?

This bill criminalizes good neighbors, religious organizations, social services, helping professions, and others who might be well-situated to help multiple people in their communities who need assistance in voting. It is both voter suppression with respect to voters and voter suppression by proxy in deterring people who might be able and inclined to assist them.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Christian Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

M. Christian Green
President, League of Women Voters of Louisiana
Chair, LWVLA Voting Rights Committee