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ANNUAL REPORT

23



Fair
Elections
Center

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

Our democracy works best when everyone's voice is heard. That is why we work to defend and expand access to the ballot box year-round, every year.

Too many people can't exercise their right to vote or must overcome significant obstacles to do so. In 2023, we continued our work to overcome these barriers and, in turn, saw major growth and wins on behalf of voters nationwide. We won important court decisions to protect access to the ballot in Arizona and Wisconsin. We helped boost student turnout in statewide elections that may well affect the outcomes of the 2024 presidential election. These include state Supreme Court elections in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, as well as the statewide legislative elections in Virginia. We helped students navigate complicated special elections and initiatives in Ohio, where reproductive rights were on the ballot. We laid the groundwork for recruiting robust pools of poll workers ahead of 2024 by continuing to build relationships with state and local election officials. And so much more...



Defending democracy is not easy, but we are focused and engaged. We do not back down when state and federal lawmakers push to pass rules that impede citizens' right to choose who best represents them at the polls.

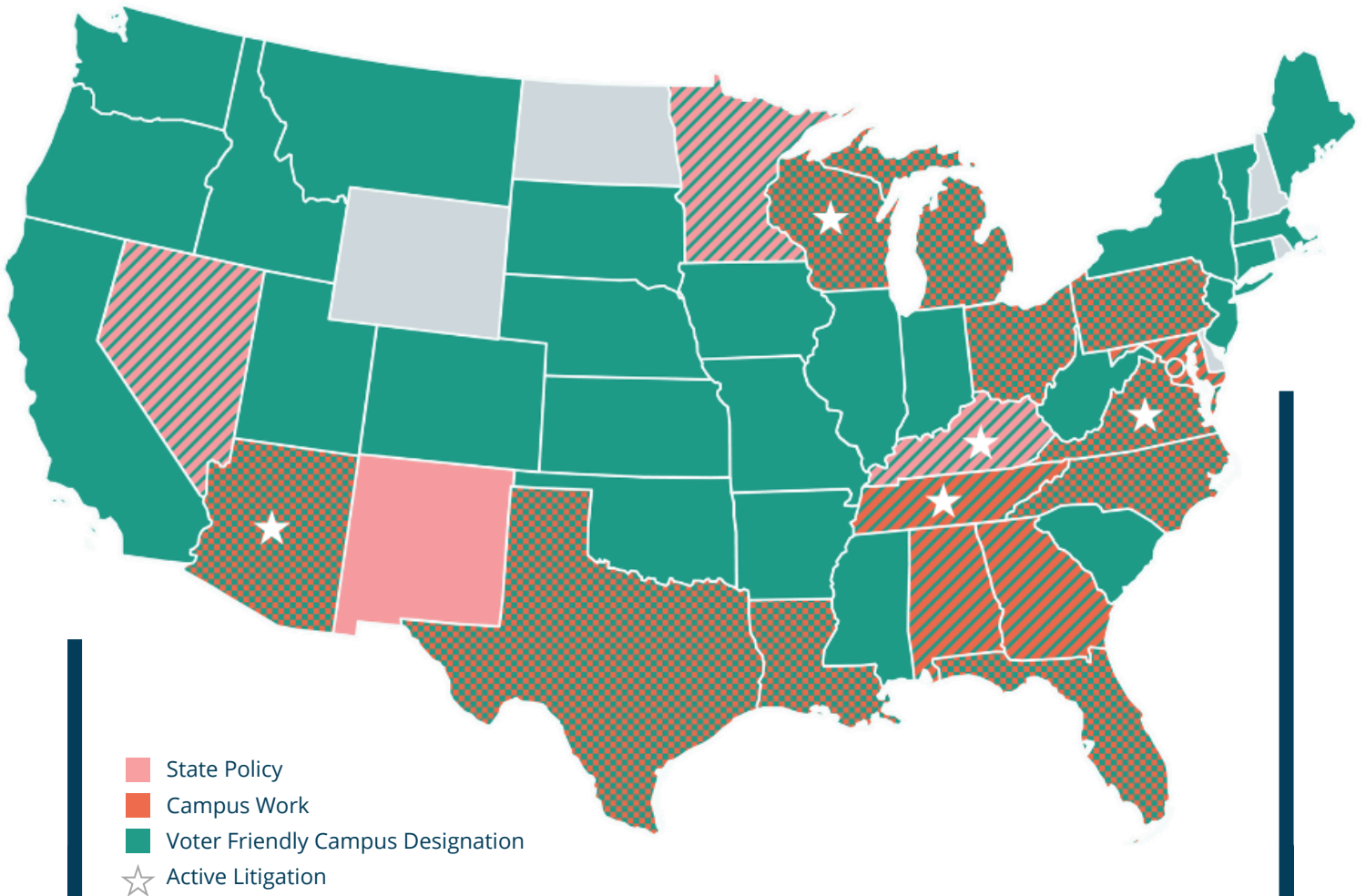
Our team accomplished so much last year, and I am excited to share the highlights with you in this report. Thank you for your unwavering support of our work. As we enter our 18th year, we recognize our success is because of the work of our student fellows, campus administrators, grassroots partners, donors and grantmakers, pro bono counsel, election officials, and all those who know that our country and communities are successful when our democracy is strong.

Here's to building a stronger democracy,

Robert M. Brandon
President and CEO



OUR FOOTPRINT



States with multiple colors indicate multiple facets of our work being performed in that state.

The Fair Elections Center (FEC) engages in both national policy initiatives and state-by-state efforts, and through our Work Elections project, we aim to recruit poll workers in every state except Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington (where voting is all vote-by-mail).



FEC Legal Fellow Emily Davis gives a presentation on the organization's litigation and policy work at the 2023 Texas Student Voter Summit.

ADVOCATING AT EVERY LEVEL

FEC's staff attorneys do more than litigate—they draw on their deep expertise in voting rights law to track legislation in 17 key states that has the potential to impact voting. The team works closely with local coalitions, grassroots partners, and legislators to support or oppose policies by providing analysis, talking points, toolkits, and direct testimony.

For example, in 2023, FEC supported pro-voter legislation in Michigan and Minnesota to strengthen voter registration and turnout. We opposed harmful legislation in Ohio, and provided information to federal agencies to inform their policies.



INFORMING NATIONAL POLICY

FEC provided key information to US Department of Education staff for their "[Toolkit for the Promotion of Voter Participation for Students](#)," which shares resources with schools to help support students with voter registration and civic engagement opportunities and makes recommendations that mirror our own approach. The department also released guidance clarifying that students who do civic engagement work with a federal, state, local, or tribal public agency can use federal work-study funds.



"We are thrilled that the U.S. Department of Education has released such a comprehensive guide of resources for schools to support student voters...Young voter participation is essential to the health of our democracy. Students are our nation's future leaders, and research shows that when young people start voting early on, it becomes a lifelong habit. Our institutions, from the federal government to our local schools, have a civic purpose to fulfill by providing students with the resources necessary to help them build informed civic habits that benefit us all."

— Mike Burns, National Director of Campus Vote Project.



ADVOCATING AT THE STATE LEVEL

Minnesota

FEC staff testified in support of [Minnesota's HF 495](#), to require post-secondary institutions to provide election officials with the necessary residential information for students who get state financial aid to qualify for Election Day voter registration.

Michigan

Michigan signed into law [HB 4569](#), which allows 16-year-olds to preregister to vote. The bill was signed into law as part of a larger set of reforms to reduce barriers to voting in the state. FEC helped provide policy advice to our partners in Michigan and collaborated with their Secretary of State to promote strong pro-student voting laws and policies.



Michigan Democracy Fellows Abdullah Aljanabi (left) and Fatima Yahya (right) pose with Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson after the signing of a pre-registration bill in Michigan.

"Preregistration has been shown to consistently improve voter registration rates and increase the likelihood that young citizens—who are the future of our democracy—will vote and stay engaged in elections upon reaching voting age...It will prepare our young people for a future with fewer barriers to voting, expand opportunities for teens to organize in their communities, and assist students in developing voting habits that will last a lifetime."

— Michelle Kanter Cohen, FEC Senior Counsel and Policy Director

Ohio

Our team sent a letter expressing concern over the implementation of HB 458, the strictest voter ID bill in the nation, to Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose. We urged his office to take lawful measures to reduce confusion during the early voting period prior to the law taking effect.

The letter was co-signed by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Buckeye Chapter, Asian Services in Action, and the Ohio Student Association



LITIGATING FOR DEMOCRACY

FEC investigates under-the-radar voting rights violations and takes legal action to enforce federal and state law requirements. FEC identifies opportunities to remove barriers and expand equal access to the ballot. Many of the barriers we address are identified through our partnerships with grassroots voter registration and mobilization organizations, including members of the State Voices and America Votes tables. We collaborate on litigation with partners like the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Kentucky Equal Justice Center.





The Fair Elections Center legal team, along with legal teams from Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest and the law firm of Arnold & Porter.

Battling Voter Suppression in Arizona

Egregious voter suppression provisions in two Arizona bills were blocked by the U.S. District Court. The court sided with FEC and voting rights groups, striking down pieces of the law that would have required election officials to investigate the citizenship of registered voters. Our team successfully argued that the laws unlawfully empowered officials to deny eligible naturalized citizens the right to

vote based on subjective standards and unreliable database-matching checks, violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the National Voter Registration Act. FEC, along with the law firm of Arnold & Porter and the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest, filed the lawsuit on behalf of Poder Latinx and Chicanos Por La Causa.

“In an echo of the Jim Crow era, the ‘reason to believe’ law gave election officials license to discriminate against naturalized citizens by subjecting them to baseless citizenship checks and registration cancellation whenever they merely suspected a voter was not a U.S. citizen. The court’s decision should be a wake-up call for Arizona lawmakers, who need to stop targeting naturalized citizens and instead focus on reforms that will increase participation in the democratic process.”

— Jon Sherman, Litigation Director and Senior Counsel

A Victory for Wisconsin Absentee Voters

The Wisconsin Court of Appeals rejected the state legislature's motion to block legal protections for absentee voters secured in our ongoing lawsuit, *League of Women Voters of Wisconsin v. Wisconsin Elections Commission*. We argued that Wisconsin voters should not be denied their right to vote due to technical errors in a witness's address, especially when they are not uniformly given a chance to remedy them. That ruling relied on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits denying the right to vote for technical errors or omissions that are not material to determining a voter's eligibility. This decision will be essential to protect voters in the 2024 Wisconsin primary and in the November election.

Our Mission to Restore Voting Rights

Our rights restoration litigation work aims to move states away from the subjective personal choices of individual governors and towards an objective and clear process for individuals who have completed their felony sentences to seek the return of their rights.

Since 2019, we have worked with the Kentucky Equal Justice Center to fight for voting rights restoration on behalf of seven people with felony convictions, setting a precedent for future rights restoration. This case has been an uphill battle. Much of 2023 was spent bringing an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and then asking the US Supreme Court to hear the case, which they declined. We will continue to fight for rights restoration for people in Kentucky, a fight that now turns to the legislature.

In 2023, we filed a similar First Amendment case in Virginia. Virginia's last three governors utilized specific, objective, and neutral criteria, such as sentence completion, for restoring voting rights to hundreds of thousands of Virginians with previous felony convictions. But Gov. Glenn Youngkin ended this policy, exercising his unlimited discretion under the Virginia Constitution to grant or deny each individual's application for regaining their right to vote. Without laws, rules, or specific criteria, Gov. Youngkin's absolute power to decide which Virginians may regain their voting rights opens the door to viewpoint discrimination and violates the First Amendment. FEC filed the suit on behalf of Nolef Turns, Inc.—a non-profit advocacy for returning citizens—and George Hawkins, a lifelong Virginia resident who is disenfranchised due to a past felony conviction.

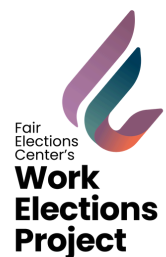




POWERING THE NATION'S ELECTIONS

The Fair Elections Center's [Work Elections project](#) has sought to improve election administration by broadening and diversifying the country's pool of poll workers since its launch in 2016. We have collected data from more than 5,000 jurisdictions in 47 states to match people with information about being a poll worker in their community, including application links, training requirements, compensation, hours, and more. Our data has been provided to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and helps drive

Power the Polls, an organization we helped launch in 2020 and that uses WorkElections' data and its API to power their poll worker recruitment efforts. During the week of National Poll Worker Recruitment Day, more than 8,600 people requested information about being a poll worker through Power the Polls, and, throughout the year, 265,000 potential poll workers were connected to the local jurisdictions to apply.





INSTITUTIONALIZING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON CAMPUSES NATIONWIDE

2023 marked Campus Vote Project's (CVP) 12th year working nationwide to institutionalize access to voting and voter information for college students. Our motto, "Every Year, Every Vote" underscores the importance of bolstering democracy on college campuses even in years without national high-profile elections. We focused on state-level elections, such as state Supreme Court races in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania; statewide legislative races in Virginia; ballot initiatives in Ohio; plus local races in Houston, Texas. We also expanded our campus partnerships with HBCUs in Alabama, Maryland, Louisiana, and Washington, D.C. CVP ended the year with more than 340 campus partners where more than 4 million students are enrolled.

We worked directly with administrators and faculty, disseminating voting guidance through a trusted source ([research](#) shows that students trust campus administrators, faculty, and staff more than almost anyone besides their parents for election information). We provided essential resources to school administrators to create campus-wide emails, social media content, and other tactics to inform every registered student. This included voter registration deadlines; integrating online or paper registration into campus activities, such as orientation and class registration; distributing state-specific rules on registration and voting, such as options for casting a ballot and voter ID; and campus-sponsored "make a plan to vote" campaigns.

Democracy Fellows

We placed and supervised 254 stipended Democracy Fellows in Spring 2023 and 260 Fellows in the fall. They partnered with administrators and faculty to create and implement democratic engagement plans on their campuses. They also organized voter registration and education events for National Voter Registration Day and classroom presentations. In 2023, our Democracy Fellows completed an astonishing 51,463 hours. This spring, 185 Democracy Fellows are returning from last year, joined by over 100 new fellows.



A student at Broward College helps students make plans to vote during Vote Early Day 2023

Voter Friendly Campuses

In 2023, we designated a record number of 262 institutions as Voter Friendly Campuses (VFC) for their efforts around the 2022 federal election cycle. The VFC program helps institutions write democratic engagement action plans that coordinate campus stakeholders in civic and electoral engagement to boost voter registration and turnout. Campuses, in partnership with CVP staff and Democracy Fellows, implement those plans around critical elections. The institutions then complete thoughtfully written self-evaluations. Campuses that complete all the steps receive the VFC designation, which lasts for two years. Incorporating democratic engagement into the collegiate experience creates structure and stability for students as they explore their political beliefs and their role in the democratic process.

A student at the 2023 Ohio Student Voting Summit



Student Voting Summits

In 2023, we hosted 12 student voting summits in Ohio, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, and Georgia, as well as two HBCU summits (in Alabama and Louisiana), a Houston-area faculty summit, and a Midwest regional summit. More than 900 students, faculty, staff, and partners representing 137 campuses participated. Voting summits help administrators, faculty, and students use democracy-focused organizing to foster civic engagement on their campuses and communities. We focused on providing accurate information about voting, supporting campus planning efforts through the midterm elections, and creating a community passionate about democracy building. We also awarded mini-grants to campus partners to help fund locally-designed democratic engagement efforts.

The HBCU Legacy Initiative

HBCUs have a deep, rich history in our nation's civil rights and voting rights struggles and a unique educational culture. We can most effectively increase Black student voter participation by recognizing that uniqueness and connecting that historical legacy to present-day institutional engagement and support. Our [HBCU Legacy Initiative](#) works to combat specific challenges HBCUs face. We worked with institutions and alumni organizations, including the National Pan-Hellenic Council (the Divine Nine) to support 46 HBCU campuses.



Two students at the 2023 Alabama State Student Summit at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville, AL.

Supporting Student Voter Turnout

In 2023, we reached more than 1 million students in our efforts to increase voter education and boost turnout in local and state elections. We supported student voter turnout efforts for the Wisconsin Supreme Court election, which came close to the record turnout numbers in the 2022 federal election cycle. We reached roughly 400,000 student voters in Ohio, 400,000 students in Pennsylvania, and 250,000 student voters in Virginia, as well as more in the Houston area, ahead of the fall elections. We printed 10,000 palm cards, distributed 10,000 coffee sleeves with QR codes connecting to voting information at

student unions and local coffee shops, created digital nonpartisan voting guides, and partnered with the Election Protection coalition to monitor student-specific voting challenges. Our digital ad campaign, connecting students with our [state-specific voting guides](#), was viewed more than 2 million times in Pennsylvania, 1.9 million times in Ohio, and 1.2 million times in Virginia. We also created state-focused [Know Your Voting Rights](#) guides (including Spanish translations for Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia) to fend off unfounded challenges to casting their votes in person.



Participants at the 2023 North Carolina Student Voter Summit

TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

FEC released and updated a comprehensive array of educational resources aimed at empowering individuals with the knowledge and tools for navigating all facets of the electoral process.

1. **Student I.D. as Voter I.D.**: A national overview of the laws in place that allow students to use their college or university I.D. to cast a ballot
2. **Hispanic/Latino Voter Toolkit**: English and Spanish resources for Hispanic/Latinx voters. Created by Student Advisory Board Latinx & Hispanic Affinity Representative, Valeri Hernandez Godinez, and Communications Intern Fiorella Recchioni
3. **Student Voter Advocate Toolkit**: Prepares communities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Texas for key state-wide elections
4. **State Student Voter Guides**: Voting resources for students in every state
5. **Know Your Rights Guides**: Guides for ten states to help voters if they encounter problems at the polls
6. **Voter Registration Drive Guides**: Requirements and guidance on conducting voter registration drives in every state
7. **Poll Worker Recruitment: Recommendations for a Better Voter Experience**: Guidance on strengthening and streamlining poll worker recruitment to better meet the needs of election administrators and to create larger, more diverse pools of prospective poll workers ahead of November 2024
8. **Local Initiatives to Improve the Voting Experience: Recommendations for Local Elected Officials and Election Officials**: Policies and best practices for local officials to improve administration of voter registration, poll worker recruitment and training, voter education, and other administrative practices



FAIR ELECTIONS CENTER IN THE NEWS

FEC continued to make news and increase its profile in the voting rights and election reform arena.

Some highlights of coverage featuring our work included:

- [Republican-controlled states target college students' voting power ahead of high-stakes 2024 election](#) | CNN | May 2, 2023
- [Ahead of 2024 election, several states overhauled voting laws](#) | The Washington Post | May 15, 2023
- [Republicans Are Targeting the Youth Vote in 2024, But Students Are Fighting Back](#) | Teen Vogue | Aug. 7, 2023
- [A Legal Fight Over Whether Governors Can Deny Thousands the Vote](#) | The New York Times | Oct. 16, 2023
- [Ahead of 2024, Felons Fight to Regain Right to Vote](#) | The Wall Street Journal | Oct. 5, 2023
- [Election officials are looking for younger poll workers at high schools, colleges. Will it work?](#) | USA Today | Nov. 3, 2023

PLANS FOR 2024

2024 will be a very busy year for all of our programs, given the presidential election and countless other positions and ballot initiatives in every state.

Our policy staff is hard at work monitoring and responding to legislative sessions and working with our state partners to advance pro-voter reforms and to combat voter suppression.

We continue to fight against the disenfranchisement of voters through impactful litigation in Arizona, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Virginia, and elsewhere. The WorkElections.org poll worker recruitment data and website have been updated and we are working with local election officials to ensure they have a robust pool of poll workers, an effort further aided by our continued support of Power the Polls. We will be reaching an impressive 350+ campus partners and more than 4.5 million students with critical information they need to register and vote. Already, at least 350 campuses have signed formal commitment letters to participate and boost student turnout in fall 2024, a new record for the program! Eleven HBCUs and 45 community colleges are in this cohort. A robust 350-400 stipended student Democracy Fellows will carry out our program during both semesters and spend tens of thousands of hours on their campuses working with administrators, faculty and students.

The stakes are high in 2024, and we expect voters to turn out and make their voices heard with Fair Election Center's support.



HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK WITH TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

The work of Fair Elections Center is made possible by generous donations from individuals, foundations, and other organizations. We are grateful to everyone who makes gifts and grants, at any dollar amount. Thank you for everything you've done for us in 2023.



If you'd like to make a donation online, **please go to: bit.ly/FECDonate**



If you would prefer to make your gift via mail, **please make a check out to Fair Elections Center and send to: Fair Elections Center, PO Box 66, Marietta, OH 45750**



For all other business communications: **Fair Elections Center, 1825 K St., NW, Ste. 701, Washington, DC 20006.**



If you have any questions about other ways to give, **please contact our Development Director, Mary Anne Walker at mwalker@fairelectionscenter.org or 202-331-0114**



