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Voting Rights Groups Sue to Block New Restrictions that Make Voter Registration Much Harder in Florida

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Today, Fair Elections Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a lawsuit to challenge Florida Senate Bill 90, an omnibus voting rights bill that, among other things, requires civic organizations engaged in voter registration activities to provide misleading information to voters that the organization “might not” submit their registration application on time and to direct voters to the online registration portal. The law imposes this requirement even though Florida already has some of the most onerous third-party voter registration laws in the country, imposes hefty penalties for non-compliance, and has not had any significant issues with untimely applications across the state.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of Harriet Tubman Freedom Fighters, Corp. and HeadCount, two nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations that focus their registration efforts on new voters, particularly youth, communities of color, and returning citizens. The complaint challenges the new law’s misleading disclaimer and disclosure requirements and alleges that the new law is void for vagueness under the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, compels speech in violation of the First Amendment, and prevents organizations from exercising their First Amendment expressive and associational rights.

“HeadCount has served Florida voters for 16 years, and our volunteers have established deep roots and trust throughout the state.” said Tappan Vickery, director of Voter Engagement for HeadCount, “We believe that peer-based community voter registration outreach is essential to democracy and groups like ours must meet voters where they are. The new requirements not only discredit our work but put democracy itself at risk.”

“Voter registration organizations serve their communities by building trusted relationships with Floridians for whom voting and participation may not otherwise be accessible,” said Michelle Kanter Cohen, policy director and senior counsel at Fair Elections Center. “We are bringing this lawsuit to protect our clients’ right to organize through voter registration activities, communicating their message that our democracy works better when all our voices are heard.”

According to one of Harriet Tubman Freedom Fighter’s founders and officers, Sheila Singleton, “Florida Senate Bill 90 is just the latest attempt by the politicians in Tallahassee to entrench their

power by making it more and more difficult for people to vote. Registering to vote is the first critical step in having one's voice heard and this law creates serious obstacles to people trying to do just that. Harriet Tubman Freedom Fighters, along with our partners across the state, will continue to challenge this unconstitutional law and stand up for the voting rights of all Floridians.”

“Unfortunately, Florida’s legislature has a history of targeting community voter registration organizations with unconstitutional and irrational regulations that violate the First Amendment. SB 90 is no different, especially considering its enactment during a legislative session marked by little public input and other laws criminalizing Floridians’ exercise of their First Amendment freedoms,” adds Emma Bellamy, senior staff attorney for voting rights at the Southern Poverty Law Center. “We hope the Court recognizes that protecting the First Amendment and voter registration activities is a non-partisan issue and vital for the continuation of a robust and free democracy.”

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida. Read the complaint [here](#).

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Fair Elections Center is a national nonpartisan and non-profit voting rights and election reform organization based in Washington, DC whose mission is to use litigation, public education, and advocacy to remove barriers to registration and voting, and to improve election administration.

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people. For more information, visit www.splcenter.org.