



## PROTECTING THE VOTE FOR ALL AMERICANS

March 20, 2024

Hon. Gerald Beaulieu, Chair  
House and Governmental Affairs Committee  
900 North 3<sup>rd</sup> St.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Dear Chair Beaulieu and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Fair Elections Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation, I'm writing to express our strong opposition to HB 506, a bill to require any individual or entity that is not an election official or voter registration agency that hosts "voter registration drive[s]" to register in a manner prescribed by the Secretary of State before holding such events. This bill will likely curtail critical, patriotic activities at the heart of American Democracy: efforts to encourage and assist fellow citizens in having their voices heard in our elections.

Community organizations play a crucial role in expanding the electorate, empowering individuals to participate in the political process, and keeping voter rolls up to date by assisting people in registering to vote or updating their information if they have moved or changed their name. These organizations' activities, such as providing community-based voter registration opportunities, are particularly important for marginalized communities who often lack access to opportunities to register to vote or information about the process. Importantly, Black registrants are nearly twice as likely to report registering through a community-based registration drive as opposed to white voters.<sup>1</sup>

Voter registration assistance takes place across Louisiana at schools and universities, religious services, transportation hubs, and community events, and it is undeniably vital for the health of democracy. These activities sometimes occur more spontaneously when opportunities present themselves to help eligible community members register to vote and participate in our democracy. Unfortunately, HB 506 will make this organic voter registration assistance as well as more formal voter registration events or programs significantly more challenging to host and will likely disincentivize many small community-based organizations from even venturing to offer voter registration assistance entirely. With limited capacity or resources, the registration requirements will become burdensome and the the threat of

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<sup>1</sup> Method of Registration, By Selected Characteristics: November 2022, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Nov. 2022), available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>.



significant criminal liability may force many groups and individuals to forgo offering voter registration assistance at all.

HB 506 is also likely to cause significant confusion and concern among many of the organizations that strive to make voter registration and resources about the process more accessible to voters. This bill is exceedingly vague regarding the conduct of an organization or entity that constitutes a “voter registration drive.” For example, although we do not believe it to be the intent of this body to do so, the lack of clarity in the bill could result in, for example, the registration requirements and potential criminal penalties for noncompliance applying to any organization that merely offers interested and eligible individuals the use of computers or tablets to access and apply to vote on the state’s online voter registration portal.

Finally, this bill entirely delegates the authority to promulgate the registration requirements it mandates to the Secretary of State’s office. This unfettered discretion could likely mean significant changes between administrations in what information is required to be provided in order to lawfully engage in voter registration activities, further confusing and burdening the often-small community-based organizations that do this important work to assist their neighbors and fellow community members.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Committee to oppose HB 506. Should the Committee decide to proceed with this legislation, we recommend the following: 1) exempting organizations collecting a small number of voter registration applications; 2) explicitly limiting the scope of the registration requirement to collection of Louisiana paper voter registration forms. Doing so would ensure burdensome registration requirements are at least not preventing the smallest, most underresourced organizations in Louisiana from doing this important work to expand access to voter registration in their communities, and would further ensure that efforts to facilitate registration securely, electronically, and conveniently for voters and officials are not limited. These civic-minded efforts not only ensure more democratic participation in our elections but make our democracy more reflective of the people it serves. If you have any additional questions or need additional information, please contact me at the email address provided below.

Sincerely,

**Patrick Williamson**

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