



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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June 3, 2011

The Honorable Lamar Smith, Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith:

I am writing concerning the recent wave of state legislative efforts aimed at impeding and disenfranchising voters - including the radical overhaul of voting rights in Florida recently signed into law by Florida Governor Rick Scott and other measures enacted in Wisconsin, Texas and other States. Regardless of one's position on these legislative changes, they raise a number of significant questions under our civil rights and voting rights laws as well as the U.S. Constitution. These vital issues should be examined by the Judiciary Committee. I respectfully request that you immediately hold hearings regarding the new changes to Florida voting law and the similar changes being proposed and enacted in other States.

I hope you agree that the Judiciary Committee has an obligation to ensure that States are not encroaching on the federal voting rights afforded to all Americans. Voting is the foundation of our democracy, and any law that undermines the basic voting rights of Americans is a direct assault on our way of life. Sadly, there is a disturbing trend across America of new laws making it harder for Americans to exercise their most basic and most fundamental right to vote.

I recently joined with six of my fellow Florida Members of Congress, including Senator Bill Nelson, to express our concern that the changes to Florida election law made in HB1355 represent a clear violation of the Voting Rights Act and asking that the Department of Justice use its authorities under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act to examine these changes for their impact on minority access to the polls. Florida's new law establishes barriers to voters who have moved between counties, forcing legitimate voters to cast provisional ballots, a provision that will be especially burdensome for college students and the hundreds of thousands of Floridians who have moved or lost their homes due to the recent foreclosure crisis. Decreasing the permitted number of days for early voting from 14 to only 6 days also poses challenges to working Floridians and elderly voters and will increase lines at the polls on Election Day. We also raised concerns about unprecedented restrictions on third party, volunteer-driven voter registration efforts that will without question have a chilling effect on voter registration in Florida, our nation's fourth largest State.

While we can all agree that States must do everything in their power to minimize and eliminate voter fraud as proponents of these changes claim is their motivation, the fact remains that there

have been no significant instances of voter fraud in the State. The role of government should never be to curtail the registration of newly eligible voters or hinder Americans from exercising the most fundamental democratic right afforded by our Constitution.

While I feel strongly that Florida's changes represent facial violations of the Voting Rights Act, I recognize that these are complex issues that merit closer examination. I therefore request that you use your chairmanship to immediately call hearings on the voting rights implications of so-called election law reforms so that the American people have an opportunity to consider the potentially devastating impacts that this legislation could have on our democracy.

It is clear that changes to the elections laws across the country will have serious consequences for voting rights nationwide and should be examined extensively. I hope we have that opportunity very soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ted Deutch", with a stylized, cursive script.

Ted Deutch

Cc: The Honorable John Conyers Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on the Judiciary