



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Press Conference on Court Battle over Florida Elections Law

Where: Orange County Courthouse, 425 N. Orange Avenue, Orlando, Florida
32801

When: Friday, December 16, 2011 at 1 p.m.

Who: LWVF President and members from across Florida

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League of Women Voters, Rock the Vote, Florida PIRG Ask Federal Court to Block Florida Voter Registration Restrictions

New Law Forces LWVF and Rock the Vote to Suspend Registration Drives

Tallahassee, FL - Today attorneys for the League of Women Voters of Florida, Rock the Vote, and the Florida

Public Interest Research Group Education Fund ["PIRG"] filed suit in federal court in Tallahassee challenging

Florida's onerous new restrictions on community-based voter registration drives. The attorneys representing the

civic groups are with the Brennan Center for Justice, the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Florida,

and leading pro bono law firms Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, and Florida-based Coffey

Burlington. The civic groups asked the court to block Florida's new restrictions on the basis that they violate

both the U.S. Constitution and the National Voter Registration Act.

This suit follows on the heels of a speech in which Attorney General Eric Holder specifically pointed to Florida's

law as an example of recent legislation that restricts Americans' ability to cast a ballot. In reaffirming America's

commitment to our core right to vote, he stated that "protecting this right, ensuring meaningful

access and combating discrimination must be viewed, not only as a legal issue but as a moral imperative." The action by the civic groups today represents the front lines of this moral imperative.

The restrictions challenged in the suit were enacted by Florida legislators earlier this year as part of H.B. 1355, a broad package of election law changes. They include extremely burdensome administrative requirements, unreasonably tight deadlines for submission of completed forms, and heavy penalties for even the slightest delay or mistake. These restrictions are so unnecessarily harsh that they have forced the League of Women Voters and Rock the Vote, among other groups, to shut down their voter registration programs in Florida.

As Deirdre Macnab, President of the League of Women Voters of Florida, explains: "For over 72 years, League volunteers have faithfully and successfully helped to register eligible Florida voters. Sadly, Florida's anti-voter Law creates impassable roadblocks for our volunteers, who are simply trying to bring fellow citizens into our democratic process. Today, we take a stand against these unacceptable barriers to voting and voter registration."

Heather Smith, President of Rock the Vote, states: "As the nation's largest young voter organization, we've dedicated more than two decades to educating and empowering young people to participate in our nation's democracy. Through our volunteer youth-led programs on campuses and in communities to our civics education initiatives in high schools, Rock the Vote has encouraged hundreds of thousands of young Florida residents to have a voice in their community and country. We are outraged at these new laws that will prevent opportunities for youth civic participation; it is simply un-American."

Brad Ashwell, Advocate for Florida Public Interest Research Education Fund, added, "Our representative democracy relies on an engaged citizenry, yet voter turnout in Florida remains far too low. That's why we work to sign up thousands of first time voters across the state each election cycle. It's unfortunate that rather than find ways to bring new voters into the fold, the Florida Legislature is instead targeting groups that help attract new voters. This law will inevitably lead to fewer voters at the polls."

The new law is regarded by many voter registration groups as an attempt to regulate voter registration drives out of existence by burying such efforts in red tape and threatening volunteer-based organizations with massive fines. The Brennan Center and the League of Women Voters also filed lawsuits against Florida's two prior laws restricting community-based voter registration. "This law represents Florida legislators' third attempt in six years to drown voter registration groups in regulation," said Lee Rowland, counsel for the Brennan

Center's Democracy Program. "It is unfortunate that we have had to represent Florida's leading voter registration groups, not once, or twice, but three times in fighting back against the Florida legislature's repeated attempts to stifle access to voter registration opportunities."

According to today's court filing, the League of Women Voters of Florida, Rock the Vote, and Florida PIRG argue that Florida's restrictions violate the U.S. Constitution or federal law in three main ways: (1) they violate Plaintiffs' constitutionally protected rights of speech and association; (2) they fail to give individuals and groups fair notice of how to comply with its confusing and unclear mandates; and (3) they violate the National Voter Registration Act - a federal law designed in part to encourage community-based voter registration activity.

In another ongoing suit, the State of Florida is requesting a panel of federal judges in Washington, D.C. "preclear" H.B. 1355's controversial provisions, including the voter registration restrictions, under the Voting Rights Act. Under the Act, Florida must seek permission from the federal government before implementing changes to election laws in five of Florida's counties, by proving that the law has neither the purpose nor the effect of harming minority voters. The League of Women Voters of Florida, other civil rights organizations, and individuals including voters and election officials, have all intervened in that suit to demonstrate that Florida will not be able to make this showing given the law's impacts on minority voters. The League is represented in that case by the Brennan Center, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and pro bono counsel from the law firm of Bryan Cave LLP.

Today's lawsuit argues that Florida's law forces League of Women Voters of Florida, Rock the Vote, and Florida PIRG to scale back or eliminate their voter registration efforts - even as voter registration rates have continued to decline in Florida.

For more information or to request an interview, please contact the individuals listed above.