



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Federal Judge Halts Florida's Restrictive Voting Law

*League of Women Voters, Rock the Vote, and Florida PIRG Filed Lawsuit to Block Florida Voter Registration Restrictions*

Tallahassee, FL -- Civic groups scored a clear victory today, as a federal judge blocked enforcement of Florida's controversial election law, which places onerous restrictions on community-based voter registration drives.

The League of Women Voters of Florida, Rock the Vote and the Florida Public Interest Research Group Education Fund (PIRG) [filed a lawsuit](#) in December challenging the restrictions. Today, after hearing evidence and arguments from plaintiffs, a federal court preliminarily blocked enforcement of the law until it can reach a final decision on claims that the law violates the U.S. Constitution and federal statutes.

"For over 72 years, League volunteers have faithfully and successfully helped to register eligible Florida voters," said **Deirdre Macnab, president of the League of Women Voters of Florida**.

"Thanks to today's ruling, we are one step closer to continuing this important work. Florida's anti-voter law creates impassable roadblocks for our volunteers, who are simply trying to bring fellow citizens into our democratic process. We are grateful the court recognized that the Constitution does not tolerate these types of barriers to civic participation and voter registration."

"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," said **Heather Smith, president of Rock the Vote**. "Rock the Vote has encouraged hundreds of thousands of young Florida residents to have a voice in their community and country. Today's ruling is a victory for them and for our democracy."

"Our representative democracy relies on an engaged citizenry, yet voter turnout in Florida remains far too low," said **Brad Ashwell of the Florida Public Interest Research Education Fund**. "That's why

we work to sign up thousands of first-time voters across the state each election cycle. We are pleased the court froze this law, so we can continue to fulfill this mission."

"Today's ruling is a clear victory for Florida voters," said Lee **Rowland, counsel for the Brennan Center's Democracy Program**. "The Florida Legislature has tried repeatedly to stifle access to voter registration opportunities. By halting the law, the court has stood up for voters, and for civic groups across the state helping Floridians register to vote."

The Florida law is just one in a wave of restrictive voting measures that passed in 2011. Together, these laws could make it harder for up to 5 million people to vote this November, according to the Brennan Center's report [Voting Law Changes in 2012](#).

### **Lawsuit Background**

The restrictions challenged in the suit were enacted by Florida legislators in 2011 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 forced the League of Women Voters of Florida and Rock the Vote, among other groups, to shut down their voter registration programs in Florida -- even as voter registration rates have continued to decline in Florida.

Many voter registration groups regard the new law 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 of Florida also filed lawsuits against Florida's two prior laws restricting community-based voter registration.

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 in three main ways:

- (1) They violate the 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.

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