

US SENATE RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
COMMITTEE

National Center for Civil and Human Rights

July 19, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Klobuchar, (Ranking Member Blunt) and members of the Committee.

Because I stand before you today as a member of the largest State Legislative Black Caucus in the Nation;

Because we were literally in the trenches on this issue, doing whatever we could to combat and in some cases, prevent it from being worst law;

Because – in large measure – it is the voters we represent that will be most negatively affected by these new laws;

Because we value this Committee's purpose here today, and so appreciate your members, particularly your member, and our Senator Jon Ossoff and our Senator Raphael Warnock who gave (prayer/remarks), I want to express my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to be before you.

And if I may, I can tell you first-hand that Senators Ossoff and Warnock are not only extraordinary public servants, but the kind of people, that make you want to take leave from your job, to speak all over the State on their behalf; to give; and do all you can to motivate voter participation.

After the most successful election – and I define its success, not by our candidates winning their elections, but

by the fact that when you have as many people vote as we did in the 2020 election cycle, with as few problems, with all challenges being dismissed – you have to consider that to be successful. Evidence of a strong Democracy.

For those who are amending election laws in states, where they can, you really don't have to wonder, what their true intent is.

Since we are in Atlanta, the birth and nurturing place of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I'm reminded of what he said decades ago, when asked about voting rights as they pertained to African-Americans – but he certainly could have been talking about any American – when he said, “Some people, don't want some people to vote!”

When you have the highest levels of voter participation, combined with the lowest levels of challenges, why would you want to change that?

And it's worth noting that the laws we operated under during the last election cycle were put in place by the same majority party that is now trying to tear them down.

I could not agree more with President Biden, we ARE facing the most significant test of our Democracy since the Civil War... (of which I'm particularly sensitive, as I represent Stone Mountain, GA, which is home to the largest memorial to the Confederacy in the world)!

I heard a member of the US Congress proclaim that their intent was to make certain these state laws passed so that those states could firmly be in control of the upcoming reapportionment process, assure Republican control and create more Republican state legislative and Congressional districts.

As president of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, I hosted the Texas House Democratic Caucus for dinner in Washington last week. We compared legislative language as passed in Georgia and proposed in Texas. I suspected that the language would be similar but discovered that it was mostly identical! Verifying that these proposals sweeping the nation are being provided by such groups as the Heritage Foundation and others.

There is much talk about not being able to give food or water to voters on line, but the actual law is much more abhorrent than that. The actual law states:

NOR SHALL ANY PERSON GIVE, OFFER TO GIVE, OR PARTICIPATE IN GIVING OF ANY MONEY, GIFTS (ANYTHING OF VALUE), INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO FOOD AND DRINK.

Meaning, if a person goes to the polls with their spouse and merely offers them some chewing gum or a magazine to read while in line, that person would be subject to arrest, up to a \$1,000 fine and up to a year in jail!

We all know that the uneven way this will be enforced throughout the State; the equal protection issues; the vagueness of it, make this ripe for court challenge.

I believe Dark Money, unlimited campaign spending is wrong, and I hope you will be able to do something about it, but we will compete.

I believe voter suppression is unfair and wrong, and hope you do something about it, but our grandparents and

great grands endured far worse, and we will use this to motivate our voters.

But, what I am most concerned about and hope you come up with a solution for, is cheating umpires that these laws are creating. They are replacing elected officials in the State and Counties, who must concern themselves with the will of the voters, with political appointees, who's only concern is the will of the person who appointed them.

County Election boards throughout the State run our elections. They are changing the law such that not only are they no longer required to be non-partisan; but if they don't like the outcome of an election they can simply and immediately just take-over the election board!

These political appointees could overturn elections without fear of being held accountable by the voters. For that reason alone, these election laws should concern us all.

My former colleague, Stacy Abrams, says it best, “Our **selections** may be partisan; but the operation of our **elections** should be nonpartisan.”

Lastly, let me say that the House of Representatives was the final arbiter of this law in Georgia. It came from the Senate to the House then onto the Governor's desk for signing, within hours... moving that fast is virtually unprecedented.

As chair of the Georgia House Democratic Caucus, I was the last speaker to the bill, before we voted.

I was so impressed with Sen. Warnock's maiden speech on the US Senate floor, that I texted him, to let him know I was going to use some of his words in my closing on the House floor.

Being who he is, he sent back a quick prayer, as he wished me well.

I'd like to close with some of the remarks used:

“The designers of our government intended the voters to be able to pick their candidates; not for the candidates to pick their voters. Lest we have Democracy in reverse.

The 4 most important words in a Democracy are, ‘the people have spoken.’ So we must do what we can to let the people speak.”

Once again, thank you for this opportunity.