

**Testimony for Senator Sally Harrell
Georgia Senate District 40
Field Hearing for U.S. Senate Rules & Administration Committee
Atlanta, GA**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning regarding voter rights and access to the ballot in Georgia. I am Senator Sally Harrell and I am currently serving my fifth term in the Georgia General Assembly, representing the northern suburbs of the Atlanta area. In my capacity as a minority member of the Senate Ethics Committee, I have deliberated several large and impactful pieces of Georgia election legislation, including H.B. 316, which paved the way for the state-wide procurement of new computerized voting machines with printed ballots, and more recently, S.B. 202, the omnibus voting bill that just became law in Georgia.

Though S.B. 202 bears the title “Senate Bill,” you might be surprised to know that this bill was never vetted by the Senate Ethics Committee. When Senate Ethics passed S.B. 202, it was a two page bill addressing absentee ballot applications. But the House completely stripped out the Senate’s two page bill and replaced it with a new 98-page omnibus voting bill. The only vote in the Senate on the new bill the House sent over was to agree or disagree to their changes. There was virtually no opportunity to debate the bill in Committee or on the floor of the Senate.

The Senate Ethics Committee did consider dozens of other election bills during the 2021 session, many of which passed. However, the public was eerily absent from these hearings. This was due to the pandemic, but it was also due to last minute meeting notices, as well as Committee hearings scheduled before dawn and after dusk. Election bills were rushed through without public input and voted out along party lines. The Georgia Secretary of State, who oversees the state’s elections, was never asked to address the Committee. Minority party Committee members often saw bills for the first time just minutes before bills were voted out. Questions addressed to bill authors by minority members were frequently answered dishonestly and disrespectfully. It was very apparent to me that there is no required “oath to tell the truth” in the Georgia General Assembly.

In the nine years I have served in the General Assembly, I have never seen such blatant disregard for the legislative process as I did with the passage of S.B. 202.

It is the voters who will suffer. One of my constituents worked the polls at a library, which prior to election day served as an early voting location. She told me the story of a young man who came to the library on his lunch hour, thinking he could vote, because he had voted at this library in the past. However, since it was Election Day, he was supposed to vote in his home precinct, way across town. Because he couldn’t take more time off work, he cast a provisional ballot. Under S.B. 202, this man’s vote would have been thrown out because he showed up at the wrong precinct before 5pm. Had the majority party not rushed through S.B. 202 with total disregard to public comment and input from experts, the Georgia General Assembly could be holding hearings right now, learning and studying actual problems with our election system, rather than reacting to fallout from conspiracy theories and lies.

Georgia is not unique. Election laws are currently being re-written across the nation. Where you live shouldn't determine how hard it is to vote and whether or not your vote is counted. The time is now to take action to pass national voting standards and I implore you to do so. Thank you for allowing me to address you today and I look forward to addressing your questions.