

Hearing before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

"Democracy in Danger: The Assault on Voting Rights in Texas"

The Honorable Nicole Collier
Texas State Representative, House District 95
July 29, 2021

Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Sessions, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the invitation to offer testimony regarding the legislative efforts in Texas to limit the voice and vote of people of color. It has become apparent, based on the sheer number of bills filed in multiple states this year, that the current push to alter the electoral process is not limited to Texas.

In addition to being elected as the State Representative for House District 95 for the last 5 legislative sessions, I currently serve as the Chair of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus (TxLBC). The TxLBC is a bipartisan, bicameral organization founded by 8 members of the Texas Legislature in 1973. Today, there are 19 members and we remain committed to addressing issues affecting African Americans.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott appointed Ruth Hughes as the Secretary of State and her office determined that the 2020 General Elections were "smooth and secure." Moreover, Governor Abbott has not been able to point out the prevalence of widespread voter fraud that would necessitate the draconian changes proposed. Nonetheless, Governor Abbott issued a declaration making "election integrity" a priority for the 87th Regular Session. Multiple bills were filed relating to the electoral process, but only one garnered national attention. Senate Bill 7 was the election overhaul bill and it was ultimately defeated. In retribution, Governor Abbott not only vowed to, but he actually did, call a special legislative session to once again take up the election bill, while also vetoing Article X of the state budget. Article X funds the Legislative Branch and includes more than 2,100 state employees. On September 1, 2021, those thousands of employees will lose not only their salaries but also their health insurance. By the way, Texas already has the highest rate of uninsured adults in the nation.

Our freedom to vote is under attack and it is happening right in front of our eyes. Texas has been in violation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act every decade since its passage. Today, people of color represent more than 80% of the population in Texas. In the November 2020 General Election, Texas saw the largest voter turnout in Texas since 1992 with 66.8% of eligible voters casting their ballot; including the highest turnout in 10 years of Black, Brown, and Asian eligible voters. Too often we look for obvious signs of suppression when it comes to our freedom to vote such as poll taxes or literacy tests. However, suppression can also happen in subtle ways like when your polling location continues to change, or the hours the polls are open vary, long lines, or harsh criminal penalties for people who make simple mistakes. All of that disrupts the voting process and makes it less likely for people to participate. Voting does not have to be hard, but it should be fair and free. Communities should be able to freely elect the candidate of their choice.

The attack on our protected right to vote is not just happening in Texas, it is happening in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, and more. We need federal intervention now. A federal pre-clearance process would add a level of protection to ensure the freedom to vote is preserved. Without the passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act or the For the People Act, we will continue to see our access to the ballot chipped away.