

HOUSE ADMINISTRATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS – FLORIDA FIELD HEARING

MAY 6, 2019 BROWARD COUNTY GOVERNMENTAL CENTER, FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

I am Karen Wilkerson speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Florida. Thank you for the invitation to address you.

The League believes that voting is a fundamental right protected by our Constitution. Any attempts to suppress votes is an invasion of democracy.

Several years ago, Florida produced a purge list that included the names of voters who were rightfully entitled to vote. This was a shameful act that should never happen again. Nothing can justify these types of actions.

In Florida the League has been certified to register voters. We take this responsibility seriously and make sure that we train our workers well.

Being able to vote by mail is important in our state because of rural communities and the number of older citizens living in Florida. Only a few counties pay the return postage for these ballots. The number of voters requesting to vote by mail is increasing every year. We seem to have very long ballots with lots of proposals to amend the state constitution and approve local taxes, etc. Therefore, voters don't want to make these decisions after waiting in long lines and using the few minutes in the voting booth. Often these issues are complicated so the use of mail in ballots insures that people have time to read the proposals and do homework to educate themselves before casting their votes.

To assist voters, the League prints and makes available digitally a publication called VOTERS GUIDE which provides voting information, pros and cons on proposals, answers from candidates on hot topic issues. We also hold candidate forums throughout the state so that voters can get to know the candidates. We hold forums on judicial candidates as well. Our organization is nonpartisan so we never endorse a candidate or political party. It would help if municipal, county, and state governments assisted in the funding for these types of voter information publications. We also cover the state with presentations from our speakers bureau which present the pros and cons of all the proposals up for consideration.

Right now, the signature for mail in ballots is the check for validation. I think it is time to select a more efficient method: perhaps a ups code or last part of a social security number. There has to be a better system for this match.

We strongly believe that voting machines must have a paper trail. We support the use of early voting sites, and extended hours at elections locations. In Palm Beach County and many other counties in Florida, the Supervisors of Elections have located voting machines in elderly living facilities and home owners association of large developments. We commend these moves.

Confusion occurs when early voting sites are not available for voting on election day. Long lines are particularly troublesome in Florida because we are apt to have hot temperatures, rain, etc. while people wait outside polling locations. Some community groups try to assist by bringing folding chairs for the elderly and infirm and offer water for those bearing the hot temperatures. Perhaps it is time to explore other types of venues for voting: shopping centers that are air conditioned and have adequate parking and long open hours for instance. No doubt we will be considering digital voting in the future.

Florida has just passed legislation that will insure that the format of ballots will be easily understood by the voters. We have had instances where the instructions interfered with the candidate selections process. Hopefully, that has been cured.

I personally find it strange to understand why the voting machine industry has such an impact on us. It would make more sense for the election officials to decide what functions are needed and then to have the industry design those machines to those requests.

Perhaps the most visible trouble spot in voting is the electoral college. The myth that this system was designed to "protect" the small population states is confronted by the Federalist Papers that clearly read that this design was to make sure the "elite" controlled the polls. The League of Women Voters of the United States supports the present campaigns to move to a National Popular Vote for President. It is important that the person selected to be President of our great nation be elected by a majority of the voters. Let's face it, if a foreign county used our present system, we would condemn it and send the Jimmy Carter Foundation over there to straighten things out.

Please help us in making sure that your vote and my vote is counted to select the person to serve in the most important office in our country. National Popular Vote is a reform that must be adopted by the states.