



May 14, 2019

We are writing to you today to express our deep concerns over pending legislation set to be heard in your Committee, namely Senate Bill 9 (“SB 9”) by Senator Hughes. This dangerous bill is a sharp attack on the voting rights of our citizens, especially those who have a disability or who do not speak English. It further criminalizes the voting process and imposes substantial new burdens on our county election systems without any new funding from the State Government. We urge you to turn this legislation aside and focus instead on voting reforms that would expand access to the ballot box and bolster election security which your committee has already considered and voted out such as HB362 by Representative Israel which would assist counties in replacing aging voting equipment that both increase access and security.

In our capacity as County Judges for Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, and Travis counties, we represent a combined 11.5 million Texans, or nearly 40% of the entire Texas population, in each geographic region of the State. Officials like us at the local level must implement the laws and policies drafted in the State Capitol. And when those laws are poorly thought out and result in voters being disenfranchised, we are the ones who must explain to our neighbors how and why their fundamental rights have been infringed.

SB 9 is one more example of a poorly conceived policy that would do more to damage elections than improve them. First, SB 9 directly attacks the voting rights of some of our most vulnerable citizens, those with disabilities and who do not speak English. Second, SB 9 further suffocates our election rules with new and enhanced criminal penalties, without doing anything to improve election security. Moreover, SB 9 would substantially raise the costs that counties across Texas will have to pay to administer elections--without any new financing from the State Government to help us pay for it.

Worse yet is the new methodology that would require our counties using countywide polling places to apportion voting centers based on the percentage of registered voters in a state representative district. We are acutely aware of the discrepancies in voter registration rates across different demographic groups. This requirement would force our hand in removing polling places from communities of color and placing them in White-majority communities. The scheme is also not sound methodologically because the geography of each district is so unique -- so, for instance, just because there is a large cluster of registered voters in one part of the district does not mean it is logical to require more polling places in the sparsely populated parts of that district.

We all believe in election security, but this bill does nothing to increase faith in the integrity of our democracy. Instead, at every turn, SB 9 makes voting harder, scarier, and more confusing to voters. There is a better way and your committee has already voted it out – HB362 by Israel. We ask that your committee turn aside from this misguided bill.

Handwritten signature of Nelson W. Wolff in black ink.

NELSON W. WOLFF
Bexar County Judge

Handwritten signature of Clay Lewis Jenkins in blue ink.

CLAY LEWIS JENKINS
Dallas County Judge

Handwritten signature of Ricardo A. Samaniego in black ink.

RICARDO SAMANIEGO
El Paso County Judge

Handwritten signature of Lina Hidalgo in black ink.

LINA HIDALGO
Harris County Judge

Handwritten signature of Sarah Eckhardt in black ink.

SARAH ECKHARDT
Travis County Judge