

Chairperson Zoe Lofgren, Chairwoman Marcia Fudge, Ranking Minority Member Rodney Davis and members of the Committee:

I would like to sincerely express my thanks to this body to allow me to testify today about my experience as a victim of the voter suppression efforts of the state of Georgia. It is a position I never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would find myself fighting in 2019 the same issues as my ancestors have waged since arriving on the shores of this country in 1619 – we ask that the promise of America of liberty, justice and freedom are extended to us all. In 1965, we were led to believe that we had a win contained in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Sadly, I am here to say that fight in opposition to it has never ended and has manifested itself in disturbing ways in Georgia. For Black people and people of color? We are still viewed as holding 2nd class citizenship in the state.

The state of our elections and voting rights is a dire emergency and crisis of voter confidence. We have sent out the warning signs for years; I am asking Congress to intervene to answer this call in order to protect and defend what was so hard fought for and many of us thought, won.

I was born in 1963 – a child of the Civil Rights Movement – and as an adult, I found myself living in Atlanta, part of the mighty 5th Congressional District, represented by a legend of whom I had been told the stories of his heroic stance on Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama - Rep. John Lewis. In that same

year of my birth, a Supreme Court decision was argued and decided - Gray v. Sanders - initiated by a citizen of the same county I now reside in by Mr. James Sanders, who successfully challenged the use of a statewide election system found to be a form of voter suppression and violation of the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection – the county unit system. This system undercut and diluted the strength of the individual voter and violated the constitutional principle of “one person, one vote.” In 2017 I found myself, a Fulton County voter, challenging the legality of my state and county for beginning the process of illegally targeting myself, three of my adult children and over 380,000 voters in one action in a singular year (and part of the 1.4 million Georgia voters removed since 2012 by Georgia's Sec. of State office) to be classified as inactive voters and designated to be purged off the voter rolls using a method known as the “postcard trick.”

I remember clearly the day the notices arrived. Ironically, we received them on July 3rd, 2017, the day before Independence Day and they were a slap to the face once I realized just what we were looking at. At first, the notices appeared to be like junk advertising mailers with the exception ours had yellow change of address stickers that caught my attention. Because of my previous work doing voter registration in Georgia, I instantly knew what I was looking at and it made my blood run cold. The realization and painful understanding hit me full force that STILL, Black people are lesser beings in every form of American society, despite myself being a natural citizen. I live in a state when I am forced to constantly prove and confirm my identity - which is static in nature - or forced to overcome numerous

barriers in order to exercise the right that forms the basis of all our nation's guiding document – the right to vote.

I can't fully impart to all of you the range of emotions I felt that day – I can only best describe it as an abbreviated version of the stages of grief except in this case, acceptance was never going to be one of those emotions I would ever embrace. In its place, I felt the extreme desire and motivation to stand up and fight back against what can only be called as massive and systemic voter disenfranchisement that has gone on virtually unchecked in Georgia – from the days of Reconstruction and Jim Crow to the erosion of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court in its *Holder v. Shelby County* decision.

The problem in my case is that when we moved from College Park, which is in Fulton County, to Atlanta? Atlanta is also in Fulton County. I did what was required of me as a citizen and voter by filing a change-of-address form with the USPS. All my county election board had to do is comply to the remedy in accordance and outlined in federal law – the Voter Registration Act of 1993 – update our registration address and mail out new cards indicating our new voting precincts. Yet myself, three of my children and over 40,000 voters in my county of residence were selected to receive these illegal notices. The unanswered question remains, "What list were we on?" To date, no one on the state or county level can answer this or have even attempted to do so. What was done, was done so on orders from then Sec. of

State and now Georgia Governor, Brian Kemp; my county election board, headed by Director Richard Barron, by utilizing a list of selected voters (culled from what is still an unknown source or metrics) to receive the mailers; the actual notice referenced there was indeed indication I had moved and should have been the first clue of a violation of federal voting statute. Had anyone taken the time to examine the USPS list, they would have immediately known that the move was *intra-county* and **no** action should be initiated towards voters like myself in the same circumstance. There was also a secondary problem and larger issue at play. We *couldn't* have been legally deemed as inactive, as myself and my children had *just voted that same year in the last election, we were eligible to vote in*. Despite pointing both facts out to the state and county, both entities insisted the action was correct, led to a series of finger pointing between the two entities when I asked who was responsible for the mailers and finally forced me to seek legal relief, of which the ACLU of Georgia answered the call and provided representation in bringing forth my suit against both.

On the eve of the case being heard in court, I was contacted by the ACLU about a settlement offer that would allow the reinstatement status of voters prior to the Atlanta mayoral election whose status was questionable and 159,000 total statewide who fit the same circumstances as myself. While it wasn't the remedy I wanted or outcome, as Mr. Kemp was readying to run for higher office while being the referee in his own election, I would have hoped the purges would stop. They didn't, as in 2017, the state of

Georgia reportedly purged over 670,000 voters and had I not fought back? I would have been one of them. The purge attempt involving me affected over 380,000 voters in one action.

Right now, the state of Georgia is planning to invest \$150 million in a new unreliable and unauditible voting system that doesn't differ much from the current ones in use and when we are only NOW beginning to discovering the troubling and strange anomalies of missing Black votes out of ONLY Black voting precincts and may ultimately change the results of November's election. The state has been silent on that and has worked to prevent evidence to come forth through its vigorous defense of preventing evidence in the federal case brought forth by Coalition for Good Governance that can effectively show how our elections are conducted and counted. The problematic voting machines used in conjunction with suppressive methods as voter purges only serve to prove that Black votes really DO matter and are feared. If they didn't, then why is so much effort placed in making sure there's significant barriers and obstacles in being registered and actually counted at the polls?

It is my hope and fervent desire that this committee along with your colleagues in the US Congress will begin the work of repairing, strengthening and preserving voting rights and election integrity around the nation by a variety of measures and policy such as: restoring and strengthening the Voting Rights Act by devising a new formula for the preclearance requirement that may have prevented some of the outrageous laws we saw implemented in Georgia since Holder v. Shelby County; making voter

registration automatic in the states and institute a process one can opt out of over being constantly forced to opt IN to; end the abuses of states and county election boards of purging voters in direct violation of the Voter Registration Act of 1993; full restoration of felon voting rights should be mandatory in all 50 states upon release from custody – period. Make Election Day a federal holiday. Mandate no-excuse absentee voting nationally. Congress has the power under the Election Clause to do much to restore the promise of America and restore the faith of voters in system that has gone terribly wrong from what the Founders envisioned and does not have to make findings that states are engaged in discrimination or violating constitutional rights to right egregious wrongs that have gone on for far too long.

I'd like to close by thanking the committee for this opportunity and may God bless us all, but until then?

I hope Congress will be able to help the not just citizens of Georgia, but those around the nation facing similar or worse in our state labs of 'democracy.'

Stacey Hopkins

Atlanta, GA