



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA

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Crist's paper ballot plan fouled by anti-voter amendments

Earlier this year, with a singular clarity of purpose, Governor Crist announced his pro-voter plan to put the state of Florida on sound election systems footing. His plan called for the phasing out of the notorious electronic voting machines, replacing them with paper ballot based optical scan systems. The plan has been embraced by the vast majority of groups concerned about our election systems, including the League of Women Voters of Florida.

Since that time the legislative process burdened this clear plan with numerous anti-voter amendments. This has left the League and other conscientious pro-voter organizations deeply troubled by the resulting legislation - bill HB537 - which Governor Crist signed Monday.

While we welcome the paper ballot based systems, and the recount and audit requirements, as a fundamental necessity for the health of our democracy, it is offensive to have this pro-voter gain offset by numerous noxious unrelated provisions. Many of the objectionable amendments were added in the last rushed days of the legislative session allowing little time for debate.

The resulting overloaded HB537 passed by the Senate is close to 80 pages and changes or creates 52 sections of Florida Statutes, ranging across 13 different Chapters of Florida law, has 57 sections and looks very little like the original House Bill 537 which passed in the House by a vote of 115-1.

We urge Governor Crist to convene a blue ribbon citizens' panel to review Florida's elections laws, enforcement mechanisms and the anti-voter provisions in this and other new laws adopted this year, and recommend changes and corrections for passage by the legislature in the next session.

The impacts of the objectionable amendments in HB 537 on the voters of Florida are fundamental and concerning.

The bill:

- stifles voter registration efforts by grassroots organizations with provisions that are similar to prior years' legislation we are currently challenging in court as unconstitutional

- imposes new restrictions on citizens' initiatives that could impact initiatives across Florida - from city to county to state level efforts
- changes a number of deadlines and election procedures that we feel will benefit incumbents
- removes two of the photo identification documents previously accepted for voter identification (while the League opposes requirement of any photo ID on election day)

One particularly onerous provision we believe would result in harassment of voters who have signed a petition for a citizens' initiative. The bill allows for a citizen to 'revoke' their signature. Since the petitions will be public information, we fear this will result in a cottage industry of harassment, as citizens will be singled out and lobbied to revoke their original signature by individuals, groups, or parties that oppose that initiative. The League believes citizens can already "revoke" their signature – by voting against the initiative if it makes it onto the ballot.

We still remain strong in our support of Governor Crist's paper ballot plan, and for this and only this reason supported the bill signed Monday.

However we are deeply troubled by the many anti-voter provisions in the bill and will work with like-minded pro-voter groups and legislators to pass corrective legislation in the next session. We urge Governor Crist to continue to be "the people's governor" and convene a blue ribbon citizens' panel to review Florida's elections laws and recommend changes and corrections for passage by the legislature.

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