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DEMOCRACY NC: MARCH PRIMARY SIGNALS BIG PROBLEMS FOR NC VOTERS
Statewide Voting Rights Organization Reveals Negative Impact of New Photo ID Law

Raleigh, N.C. (May 26, 2016) – Democracy North Carolina released key findings from the March 2016 Primary on Thursday, providing mounting evidence that North Carolina’s 2013 voting law is having a negative impact on North Carolina voters. The research was included as part of the statewide voting rights organization’s amicus brief, also filed Thursday, that includes specific instances of voter disenfranchisement and asks a federal appeals court to reverse a lower court decision and overturn the law.

From a media event at the State Board of Elections headquarters in Raleigh, Democracy North Carolina’s Executive Director Bob Hall and Associate Research Director Isela Gutierrez told reporters that the organization’s March Primary poll monitoring program and related research revealed that new photo ID requirements had caused “longer lines, more delays and poll worker mistakes, greater voter confusion, and more disenfranchisement and distrust.” They called the low turnout Primary “a smaller-scale preview of the massive problems that await voters in November.”

Because of widespread problems caused by the photo ID law, implemented for the first time in North Carolina’s March Primary, the State Board of Elections has taken the unusual step of delaying the official state canvass of election results. In the weeks after the election, the State Board launched an “audit” to review county canvasses resulting in re-evaluations of March Primary votes in 20 counties where ballots were found to be wrongly rejected. The canvass will be held on May 31, 2016.

“We applaud the actions of the State Board to correct many of the wrongs identified from the March Primary election process,” said Hall. “Despite these efforts to protect North Carolina’s voting system, the evidence of the new law’s harms to voters and the integrity of the voting process continues to build.”

In the wake of the new photo ID requirement, Democracy North Carolina found that 1,419 provisional ballots cast were not counted during the March Primary because North Carolina voters did not have acceptable photo ID under the new rules.

Registered Buncombe County voter Darlene Azarmi spoke to reporters about specific problems related to the photo ID portion of the law that she faced during the March Primary. Azarmi, who is also Democracy North Carolina’s Western North Carolina field organizer, was initially told she could not vote at all because she had lost her N.C. driver’s license. After citing specific provisions of state election law, she was eventually given a provisional ballot, but without the “reasonable impediment” declaration required under new rules adopted in 2015. Only after personally contacting Buncombe County Board of Elections

Director Trena Parker was Ms. Azarmi able to make sure her vote counted. Azarmi noted that unlike her experience, “most voters don’t have the benefit of being trained voting advocates.”

Democracy North Carolina also found that over 29,000 voters were able to participate in the March Primary by using either Same-Day Registration (SDR) or Out-of-Precinct (OOP) provisional voting – two voter “safety nets” that, pending an appeal in federal court, would be eliminated for the November General Election by the General Assembly’s 2013 voting law, also known as House Bill 589.

Gutierrez pointed out that the huge difference between the number of votes saved by the SDR and OOP provisional voting, as compared to the number of votes lost due to the photo ID requirement, reveals an important lesson for November.

“Though you’d never know it from recent headlines, the repeal of Same-Day Registration and Out-Of-Precinct voting, which are included in the so-called “Voter ID law,” affects the voices of tens of thousands more voters than does the ID requirement. Looking ahead, we estimate that as many as 100,000 votes will be lost in the General Election if these options are not available to voters in October and November,” said Gutierrez.

A federal court is set to hear arguments on June 21 in an appeal of a lower court ruling upholding North Carolina’s 2013 voting law, which could decide the fate of the photo ID requirement, the availability of Same-Day Registration and Out-of-Precinct voting, as well as other election rules during the 2016 General Election.

Democracy North Carolina is a statewide nonpartisan organization that uses research, organizing, and training to increase civic participation, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and remove systemic barriers to voting and serving in elected office.

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