



Testimony of Bianca Avery – Texas HB 22 – House Elections Committee, March 11, 2021

I write as the Texas State Coordinator for Fair Elections Center’s Campus Vote Project. Fair Elections Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation. The Center’s Campus Vote Project educates and engages young voters on voting rights issues, working to institutionalize civic engagement and voting at university and college campuses, including in Texas. I write in support of HB22, as well as to suggest an amendment that would ensure election officials retain flexibility in making polling places accessible.

One in 4 eligible voters has, or lives with a household member who has, a disability. Though fewer voters with disabilities reported issues casting their ballots in 2020 than in 2012, the Election Assistance Commission still found that “the overall rate of difficulties for voters with disabilities in 2020 is almost twice the rate for voters without disabilities.” The Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) documented some of these difficulties in its own report on curbside voting and made several recommendations for improving this option for qualifying voters, including increasing signage, recruiting and training more volunteers to conduct curbside voting, and creating a hotline so that voters can alert poll workers to their presence and request assistance in English, Spanish, and other commonly spoken languages in the community.

HB22 addresses some of the issues raised in TCRP’s report. However, the requirement that each polling place reserve at least two “parking spaces” for curbside voting could potentially result in polling places actually becoming less accessible. Many people with disabilities lack personal transportation and rely on public transportation, and therefore may not be able to safely use these parking spaces. Polling places in more urban areas and on school campuses may not have sufficient dedicated parking spaces to comply with HB22, potentially resulting in the closures of those polling locations and forcing voters to travel greater distances to vote. Therefore, we suggest amending the bill to require election officials to reserve an area sufficient to accommodate at least two standard-sized vehicles for curbside voting, and that the route to this area itself be physically accessible to poll workers with disabilities and adequate for the movement and stationing of voting equipment. These changes would improve curbside voting while giving election officials greater flexibility in making polling places more accessible. The Center also encourages amendments to implement TCRP’s remaining recommendations.

Thank you for your consideration and for allowing Fair Elections Center to share its expertise on this matter. Please do not hesitate to be in touch at the provided email address or telephone number should you have any questions.