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Veteran and Disability Advocates Join Voting Rights Groups in Lawsuit Against Florida SB 90

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The Paralyzed Veterans of America Florida and the Paralyzed Veterans of America Central Florida chapters joined voters with disabilities as new plaintiffs to a lawsuit previously filed by the Fair Elections Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center challenging Florida Senate Bill 90 (SB 90), a far-reaching election bill which includes strict limits on volunteer assistance for voters and on who may handle mail-in ballots.

The original lawsuit challenges the misleading disclosure and disclaimer requirements that violate existing plaintiffs Harriet Tubman Freedom Fighters and HeadCount's First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. The new claim added yesterday seeks to ensure that all Florida voters with disabilities can exercise their right to vote by mail with the assistants of their choice, as protected by federal voting rights laws.

"Florida's new mail ballot assistance restriction makes voting exponentially more difficult for voters with disabilities, including veterans who have risked their lives and suffered extreme injury in the service of their country," said Michelle Kanter Cohen, policy director and senior counsel at Fair Elections Center. "Many veterans and other voters with disabilities rely heavily on the assistance of trusted caregivers or social workers at their living facilities to help them mail in their ballots. These voters are entitled to this assistance under federal voting rights law. SB 90 interferes with these rights. This lawsuit seeks to protect voters' right to choose the people that they trust to help them register and vote."

"Veterans who return from serving their country - often with severe mental and physical health issues - and voters with disabilities are among the Floridians most harmed by SB 90," said Emma Bellamy, senior staff attorney for the SPLC. "Capping the number of voters a caregiver can assist to cast a mail-in ballot means veterans in spinal injury care centers, seniors in assisted living, and other Floridians who cannot vote in person and cannot rely on assistance from their immediate family to cast a mail-in ballot will be disenfranchised. Our updated complaint requests that our federal courts intervene to stop SB90 from violating these individuals' rights under the Voting Rights Act and ensure that they can choose who helps them participate in the electoral process."

These new plaintiffs are challenging the provisions of SB 90 which limit the help voters can receive from volunteers in submitting their ballots. Under this new law, volunteers are restricted from helping more than two people who are not their immediate family members to deliver their ballots per election cycle. This policy limits the ability of voters with disabilities to secure assistance with casting their ballots.

Section 208 of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 provides: “Any voter who requires assistance to vote by reason of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write may be given assistance by a person of the voter’s choice, other than the voter’s employer or agent of that employer or officer or agent of the voter’s union.”

But SB 90 interferes with this right by restricting voters who are covered by Section 208 to receiving assistance from an immediate family member or someone who has assisted no more than one other person to whom the assistant is not related. This rule will hurt PVA’s members who reside in in-patient spinal injury care centers, where there are only a handful of caseworkers available to help them vote a mail ballot, as well as Section 208-covered voters who do not have immediate family in the state or do not want assistance from a family member.

Fair Elections Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center are adding this voter assistance claim to their [existing lawsuit](#) against SB 90’s restrictions on volunteer voter registration assistance, filed on June 14. This new claim is brought on behalf of the Paralyzed Veterans of America Florida, Paralyzed Veterans of America Central Florida, and individual voters with disabilities to ensure all Floridians have equal access to casting their ballots.

Read the amended complaint with the new claim at <https://bit.ly/3wJlO6j>

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Fair Elections Center is a national nonpartisan and non-profit voting rights and election reform organization based in Washington, DC whose mission is to use litigation, public education, and advocacy to remove barriers to registration and voting, and to improve election administration.

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people. For more information, visit www.splcenter.org.

The Paralyzed Veterans of America Florida is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to improve the lives of veterans with a spinal cord injury or dysfunction and other persons with disabilities to achieve maximum health, productivity, and self-esteem in their daily lives.

The Paralyzed Veterans of America Central Florida Chapter was founded in 1977 and advocates for quality healthcare for its members, research and education addressing spinal cord injury and dysfunction, service-related benefits for veterans, civil rights, and opportunities which maximize its members’ independence.