



Federal Court blocks Tennessee law that undermines voter registration

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NASHVILLE, TN – A federal court today blocked a Tennessee law that sought to undermine voter registration in the state.

The American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Tennessee, Campaign Legal Center, and Fair Elections Center challenged the law, which had imposed substantial penalties on groups that foster political participation via voter registration efforts.

The case was filed on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Tennessee, American Muslim Advisory Council, Mid-South Peace & Justice Center, Rock the Vote, Memphis Central Labor Council, and Headcount.

Tennessee ranks 44th in voter registration, but during the 2018 midterm election the state saw a surge in registrations. Instead of providing greater resources to help election offices process the influx, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a measure that creates criminal and civil penalties against those who fail to comply with onerous requirements and turn in “incomplete” applications.

The court granted a preliminary injunction today.

The following reaction is from:

Michelle Kanter Cohen, counsel, Fair Elections Center: “This is a significant victory for our clients, and other organizations like them, who help make voting and participation accessible to all citizens. The court’s ruling recognizes the critical role of these efforts in our democracy. Because the court stopped these restrictions from going into effect, the door to participation will remain open to community-based civic engagement efforts to engage fellow citizens, which are so badly needed in Tennessee.”

Theresa Lee, staff attorney, ACLU’s Voting Rights Project: “By allowing civic organizations to continue their critical work helping people register to vote, this ruling derails a law that sought to undercut democracy.”

Hedy Weinberg, executive director, ACLU of Tennessee: “Today’s ruling indicates that the court understands the dangerous burdens this law places on organizations simply trying to ensure that as many eligible voters can participate in the democratic process as possible. This decision allows our clients to continue their important work of registering voters — including those who have been historically disenfranchised — this election season. We look forward to the day when this unconstitutional law can be struck down for good.”

Danielle Lang, co-director, Voting Rights and Redistricting, Campaign Legal Center: “The court was right today to stop Tennessee’s punitive law in its tracks. This law punished civic organizations for

seeking to help register voters, particularly those in underserved communities. As the court recognized, it struck at the heart of free speech rights and imposed needless and burdensome regulations. Now groups working to help people register to vote can continue their activities, as we continue working to ensure that the threat of criminal penalties from the government is eliminated permanently by a final decision in this case. Voter registration drives for years have been a way for historically marginalized groups to empower their communities and gain access to the ballot box, and we are pleased that this tradition will be allowed to continue.”

The lawsuit, League of Women Voters of Tennessee v. Hargett, was filed in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee. Co-counsel also includes Sherrard, Roe, Voigt & Harbison PLC.

[Today's opinion can be found here.](#)

This document, case information and future updates are all available at www.fairelectionscenter.org/lwv-tn-v-hargett

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