



## Election Protection: Responding to the War on Voting

Structural deficiencies within our system of elections, shortcomings in election administration, and actors who seek to manipulate the system for partisan gain continue to disenfranchise millions of eligible Americans. In 2008 four million to five million voters did not participate because they encountered problems with their voter registration or failed to receive absentee ballots. Moreover, two million to four million registered voters were “discouraged” from voting due to administrative obstacles like long lines and voter identification requirements.<sup>1</sup>

Not only has the situation not improved since 2008, but events since the 2010 mid-term elections threaten to make matters worse. A rolling tide of disenfranchising legislation is making its way through state legislatures across the country. These bills, combined with budget cutbacks, self appointed “election integrity” squads, and a potentially toxic environment could create a recipe for mass disenfranchisement in 2012. The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers’ Committee) – through our leadership of Election Protection – will work with national and state partners to ensure that eligible voters are not denied one of the most fundamental rights in our democracy.

Election Protection seeks to change the the debate around voting to one about the need for access not increased barriers; work with election officials to enact rules at the local level to expand access; educate voters, poll workers and election officials about proper implementation of myriad changes in the voting landscape; ensure that organized efforts to keep certain voters from the polls are opposed and the rights of those voters protected ; and provide direct voter protection assistance to individual voters.

### Election Protection: A Comprehensive, Action-Oriented Approach

The well-funded and coordinated assault on the fundamental right to vote has served to heighten the need for a similarly well-funded and coordinated Election Protection campaign starting well in advance of the 2012 election cycle.<sup>2</sup> A decade long record of success has provided Election Protection with the knowledge and experience to counter this assault. The Lawyers’ Committee through the Election Protection coalition will:

- **Educate and provide technical support** to individual voters and grassroots organizations that work with voters by creating a suite of materials informing them about the changes in the law, providing legal assistance and coordination for grassroots organizations in states (with a particular focus on states with recently passed voter suppression legislation); and providing assistance to voter engagement programs and efforts to help voters acquire the newly-required IDs.

<sup>1</sup> Ansolabehere, Stephen. Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2008: Common Content. Release 1, February 2, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Van Ostern, Tobin. “Conservative Corporate Advocacy Group ALEC Behind Voter Disenfranchisement Efforts.” *Campus Progress Blog*, 8 March 2011. Web. 9 March 2011.

[http://www.campusprogress.org/articles/conservative\\_corporate\\_advocacy\\_group\\_alec\\_behind\\_voter\\_disenfranchise/](http://www.campusprogress.org/articles/conservative_corporate_advocacy_group_alec_behind_voter_disenfranchise/)].

- **Work with Election Officials** to ensure that new and existing rules are implemented effectively, implement rules under their purview that will expand access and address past problems, and prevent intimidation at the polling place.
- **Build Comprehensive Local Legal Coalitions** in the form of Election Protection Legal Committees (EPLCs) that will work throughout the election cycle in at least 21 states and 35 jurisdictions to break down barriers to the ballot box for traditionally disenfranchised voters. EPLCs will develop localized Election Protection plans to: provide support to non-partisan grassroots organizations, engage with election officials, identify and address voter problems that arise before and on Election Day (through litigation if necessary); provide voter education materials, and recruit, train and deploy legal volunteers.
- **Operate the 1-866-OUR-VOTE Hotline** which will be answered by trained volunteers in selected states during the primary season and nationally in the months leading up to and including Election Day. The 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA hotline, administered by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund (NALEO), will continue to be fully integrated into the 1-866-OUR-VOTE platform, ensuring that Spanish-speaking voters receive the same support as English-speaking voters.
- **Build a real-time record** of the challenges and questions voters face through the Our Vote Live database. This information is available to the public via [www.OurVoteLive.org](http://www.OurVoteLive.org).
- **Provide Voter Support during Early Voting and on Election Day** through trained volunteers who will assist voters, identify and solve problems, and respond to issues called in through the 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline and ensure timely solutions from election officials.
- **Convene the Election Protection Coalition**, comprised of more than 160 diverse national and local non-partisan organizations, to coordinate efforts and maximize the resources and expertise of all organizations to ensure a comprehensive response to problems faced by voters.
- **Maximize Technology to educate and empower voters** through the creation of a smartphone application that is being developed in partnership with the New Organizing Institute, Rock the Vote, the NALEO, and Verified Voting, the continued deployment of the [www.866OurVote.org](http://www.866OurVote.org) website, and social networking tools.
- **Litigate** when needed to expand access to the ballot box and to prevent disenfranchisement.
- **Advocate for legislative election reforms to change the narrative** around voting and shift the debate to policies like modernizing voter registration, Election Day Registration, early voting, and preventing deceptive practices and voter intimidation that will solve the real problems voters face.

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