

FLIER: HB 1355 and SB 1504 - Legislature Weakens Democracy in Favor of Plutocracy

According to the Florida Initiative for Electoral Reform (FLIER), HB 1355 and SB 1504 seek to suppress voter participation and citizen led ballot initiatives, hampering Florida's democratic development and further entrenching plutocracy.

April 13, 2011 - [PRLog](#) -- WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. - The Florida Initiative for Electoral Reform (FLIER) has criticized HB 1355 and SB 1504 for provisions that increase barriers to voting and petitioning, and encroach on the independence of the Florida Supreme Court. "These measures are aimed to further weaken representative democracy in Florida, while strengthening the existing plutocracy," said FLIER President Yury Konnikov.

HB 1355, sponsored by Rep. Dennis Baxley and Rep. W. Keith Perry, takes away Florida voters' right, since the 1970s, to change their names and addresses at their voting locations and cast a regular ballot. Instead the bill will require voters making such changes to cast a provisional ballot which may not be counted. According to the Advancement Project, in 2008, 51% of provisional ballots in Florida were not counted.

Furthermore, the bill puts non-partisan, elected, county supervisors of elections under the control of the politically appointed Secretary of State. The Secretary would have the ability to issue orders to these county officials or remove those who do not comply, casting a partisan shadow over the entire voting process. If such control would have existed in 2008, some county supervisors of elections could not have chosen to allow eligible voters, who were not matched to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles or Social Security databases, to provide valid IDs on Election Day and cast regular ballots. Other county supervisors of elections who chose to follow the Secretary's guidance forced eligible, but unmatched voters, to fill out provisional ballots. If these voters did not return to the supervisor's office with identification during the two days after Election Day, their provisional ballots were not counted.

The bill ballooned suddenly from 14 to 128 pages just prior to its hasty passage in the House Governmental Operations Subcommittee. Bill co-sponsor Rep. Baxley explained it was a work in progress even while advocating for its hasty passage.

SB 1504, sponsored by Sen. David Simmons, seeks to revoke to Florida Supreme Court's power to remove proposed constitutional amendments from ballots for being misleading to voters. FLIER believes this is retaliation against the Florida Supreme Court for removing three 2010 ballot amendments proposed by the Legislature, including one seeking to protect gerrymandering. Simultaneously, SB 1504 seeks to impose further difficulties for citizen led efforts to get amendments on the ballot for referendum. The bill would require paid signature gatherers to be eligible voters in Florida, that their names be on all the petitions, and reduce from four years to 20 months the amount of time the petitions are valid. HB 1355 also seeks to restrict citizen led ballot initiatives by proposing to reduce the time petition signatures are valid to 24 months and repeal the right of petition signers to revoke their signatures.

FLIER sees these proposals as defensive maneuvers meant to discourage future petitioning for public interest ballot amendments such as the Fair Districts amendments to minimize gerrymandering. This will severely limit the public's ability to pass reforms despite an unresponsive Legislature hostile to the idea of reforming itself.

FLIER calls on legislators to stop tinkering with petition requirements and demonstrate they value representative democracy and Florida's further democratic development by implementing reforms that

improve, not hinder, access to voting. The Legislature can choose not to disenfranchise voters through provisional ballots. Instead, eligible voters should be able to turnout during early voting or on Election Day and, as long as they satisfy Florida's voter identification law in Florida Statute 101.043, be registered and permitted to cast a regular ballot. At least ten other states already have same-day voter registration, and Florida voters deserve no less.

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The Florida Initiative for Electoral Reform is a non-partisan coalition of groups and individuals recognizing the need for electoral reforms to enrich and expand democracy in our state and its localities. In addition to advocacy, we seek to provide education on electoral reform and the policy solutions necessary to realize it. We are working towards a vibrant democracy with accessibility for the average person, a competitive political environment, and pluralism in policy and decision making. For more information please visit <http://www.floridaelectoralreform.org> or e-mail info@floridaelectoralreform.org.

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