



Prepared Remarks on HB 270
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Special Committee on Election Integrity
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Good afternoon Chairman Fleming and Members of the Special Committee. My name is Chris Bruce and I am the Political Director for the ACLU of Georgia. The ACLU of Georgia is an organization dedicated to protecting the civil liberties of all Georgians and the right to vote is one of the most sacred civil liberties we have.

HB 270 would significantly limit absentee-by-mail voting throughout the State of Georgia by creating a ban on the issuance and mailing of absentee ballots within the 10 days prior to an election. We urge this committee to not pass this bill as currently drafted.

Under this bill, it seems that absentee ballot applications would have to be received, at the latest, 11 days, or by the second to last Friday, before Election Day. But rather than creating a new deadline for applications to be received, this bill restricts the issuance of absentee ballots. The current proposal lacks clarity on a major question: What happens to unfulfilled absentee ballot requests that were received, properly, just before the ballot issuance deadline?

This proposal fails to include any type of grace period in which elections offices could legally issue and mail the remaining ballots for applications that are received before the deadline.

We recognize that the current absentee-by-mail application system can strain election offices and create challenges for voters who apply for their ballots last-minute. An absentee ballot application received the Friday before an election has little chance of being properly issued and mailed prior to Election Day. A bill aimed at this underlying issue could move the absentee application deadline back a few days, without affecting the ability of elections offices to issue a ballot in response to a properly executed application received by the deadline. However, moving the application deadline back at least a whole week, through the mechanism of banning the issuance of ballots within ten days of Election Day, is excessive and may create an unintended burden on election offices and voters.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, fewer than ten states in our country force their voters to adhere to such an early deadline for absentee applications. Georgia would be following the minority of states and could potentially disenfranchise tens of thousands of voters if this bill is adopted.

Voters who can credibly expect to receive an absentee ballot that is mailed within the ten day period prior to Election Day, such as voters whose ballots are mailed to another location within the county, should not be disallowed from having their absentee application request fulfilled within that period. Furthermore, voters who find themselves in an emergency situation that would necessitate absentee voting, such as last minute hospitalization or travel, should be allowed to request an absentee ballot in the days nearing the election.

In the ten days before the general election in November and the runoff election in January, 34,313 Georgians not only requested absentee ballots, but voted them successfully and made their voices heard. Chairman Fleming, you may be interested to know that hundreds of voters in (423) McDuffie and Columbia were included in the democratic process of electing representatives like you because they were issued ballots within this critical 10-day period.

During this same period in Houston County, over one thousand voters (1,031) were issued absentee ballots AND successfully returned them during the general and runoff elections. In Muscogee County over one thousand voters (1,004) were issued absentee ballots and cast their ballots during this time. In Baldwin County, hundreds of (290) voters during this period were issued absentee ballots and returned them successfully.

In summary, this bill has the potential to disenfranchise a significant number of voters due to its lack of administrative clarity and overreaching timeline adjustments. We urge this committee to reject the bill as drafted. As always, we are happy to share this data so we can help draft the best policy for Georgians to vote.