



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

TESTIMONY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS SENATE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Monday, April 10, 2017

I am Cinde Weatherby, testifying as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas in SUPPORT of SB 148. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. Thank you for allowing us to share the League of Women Voters of Texas position on this bill.

We fervently believe that the participation of every eligible citizen as a voter is not only their legal right, but also important in a functioning democracy. We believe the individual who is voting should have the ability to make the decision on whom they trust to assist them as they carry out this important task.

This bill eliminates a problem that a naturalized citizen faced just three years ago just up the road in Williamson County. Mallika Das was born in India and spoke and read Bengali, but was not proficient in reading English. She had found it difficult to vote in the past, and wanted to assure that she was completely informed that time in 2014, so she requested her son's assistance. Because her son was registered to vote in Travis County, the Williamson County poll worker would not allow him to provide interpreter assistance as the Election Code specifies. She proceeded to vote without her son's assistance but still did not believe she "voted properly" for all of the measures because she could not "sufficiently comprehend the ballot." She took her voting responsibility so seriously she proceeded to file a lawsuit about the denial of assistance. Mrs. Das died before the lawsuit was resolved. But, ahead of the November 2016 election a federal district judge blocked Texas from enforcing that interpreter provision, ruling it violated the federal Voting Rights Act. As with most cases, this is being appealed by the Texas Attorney General.

The Texas Election Code allows "assistors" to provide voters with help reading or marking a ballot and permits that assistance to "occur while the person is in the presence of the voter's ballot." But, the interpreter, unlike an assistor, must be registered to vote in the same county.

As a mother and a daughter, I know that a mother counts on her offspring for many things. Where the offspring resides or is registered to vote should not have been the basis for interfering with the rights of Mrs. Das or any others in asking their sons, daughters, or any other trusted individuals for assistance.

We request that you vote approval of this bill to eliminate the interpreter provision in the Election Code that clearly contradicts the Voting Rights Act and common sense. The League thanks Senator Garcia for bringing it before you for consideration.

**For additional information, please contact: Cinde Weatherby, Voting & Elections Issue Chair,
cindeweatherby@gmail.com, 512.560.1334.**

The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) is a nonpartisan citizens' organization that has fought since 1919 to improve our government and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives. It represents more than 5,000 members and supporters in the 25 Local Leagues throughout Texas.

The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties. The member-driven organization of women and men encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and seeks to influence public policy through education and advocacy of positions based on extensive issue study and consensus.