



TESTIMONY
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS
HB 331
MARCH 18, 2013

The non-partisan League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) supports HB 331(Guillen) which would allow volunteer deputy registrars to distribute voter registration applications throughout the state and receive completed applications in person.

For the 90+ years since women gained the right to vote, LWV has educated and agitated for active, informed participation by citizens in government and believes that such participation, including voter registration by volunteers, is vital to a vibrant democracy.

The 29 non-partisan local Leagues across the state encourage voter registration and turnout in their communities with LWV members often serving as volunteer deputy registrars and election workers. Local Leagues sponsor voter registration events and are also asked to assist with voter registration at other community events.

Working in the county in which they are deputized, LWV volunteer deputy registrars encounter residents of other counties who would like to register to vote with reasonable frequency. Unfortunately under current law, volunteer deputy registrars cannot accept completed applications from residents of other counties. Eligible Texas voters would be better served if HB 331 passes so volunteer deputy registrars could accept completed applications from residents of any Texas county.

Texas has a real need for the work of volunteer deputy registrars. Texas lags the nation in voter registration, and the percentage of Texans registered to vote has been decreasing. As recently as 2000 the voter registration rate was 85%, but by 2012 it was only 75%¹. Texas is consistently among the lowest states in voter participation, 47th in voter turnout in 2008, 50th in 2010, and 48th in 2012².

To have effective representative government by the people, Texas needs substantial improvement in voter participation. However, Texas election officials don't have the resources for government-sponsored voter registration outreach. A LWV-TX survey of local election officials after the November 2012 election indicates counties depend on volunteer deputy registrars for voter registration outreach³.

Volunteer deputy registrars would be more effective if allowed to accept registration applications from all Texas residents. LWV-TX urges the Committee to approve HB 331 to make this possible. We appreciate the opportunity to express our views.

¹ Texas Turnout and Voter Registration Figures (1970-current) at <http://sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/70-92.shtml>

² American Goes to the Polls 2012, Nonprofit Vote, <http://www.nonprofitvote.org>; 2010 General Election Turnout Rates at http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html

³ LWV-TX Education Fund Survey of Election Officials 2012, http://lwvtexas.org/PDFs/77519100_1357832531.pdf