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ADVOCATES LINE UP TO TESTIFY AGAINST VOTER SUPPRESSION PROPOSALS AT ELECTIONS COMMITTEE HEARING

(Austin, TX) - Voting rights advocates called on members of the House Committee on Elections to speak out against the charges issued to the Committee to study new laws in other states regarding voter identification (ID) and proof of citizenship at the Committee hearing that will be held at 10:00 am January 25, 2008 in the Texas Capitol. Participants included the League of Women Voters of Texas, AARP, Coalition of Texans With Disabilities, Christian Life Commission, ACLU, Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, AFL-CIO, People for the American Way, TCAN, Common Cause, LULAC and other citizens' rights groups.

Voter ID legislation would require voters to present a government sanctioned photo ID at the polls, in addition to a valid voter registration card, in order to vote. Proof of citizenship legislation would require every person who registers to vote to provide "proof of citizenship" in the form of a certified birth certificate (cost \$23), citizenship papers (cost \$200) or a valid passport.

"The League of Women Voters is committed to encouraging full participation in elections by all eligible Texans and we are opposed to legislation such as voter ID and proof of citizenship laws that create new barriers to voter participation. Any proposal that restricts voter registration or raises barriers to voting in order to deal with the supposed problem of non-citizen voting is a fear-based approach instead of a fact-based solution. We simply have not seen the facts that would justify restricting the franchise." said Mary Finch with the League of Women Voters of Texas.

There is increasing evidence that a significant percentage of eligible voters do lack photo ID and those voters will in all probability be elderly, poor or minority. In a 2006 study issued by the non-partisan Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, it was reported that as many as 18% of voters aged 65 and older, or 6 million voting citizens, do not have government-issued photo identification. In addition, the same report concluded that 25% of African-American voters and 16% of Hispanic voters are less likely to possess government-issued photo id.

According to the Texas Attorney General's office, since 2002 there have been six prosecutions in the state of Texas for impersonation of a voter at a polling place and two cases of non-citizen voting, one of which is still being investigated. A survey by the Center for Democracy and Election Management at American University estimates that, stricter voter ID laws would have kept approximately 148,630 registered Texas voters from voting in the 2006 elections.

"This would particularly hurt seniors, the kind of voters who go to the polls most faithfully, casting a chilling effect on the ability of many Texans to exercise their right to vote. It's a solution in search of a problem." said Amanda Fredriksen, Advocacy Manager for AARP Texas.

"Texas faces several very serious election problems - voter intimidation and vote suppression, misinformation, voters who are inappropriately purged from registration lists and problematic voting technology," said Rebecca Bernhardt, Policy Development Director for the ACLU Foundation of Texas. "Voter impersonation and non-citizen voting are not among these problems."

"Adding more identification requirements to vote and register to vote will not address any of the election problems Texas voters face today. Our elected officials need to stop the politics of fear and suppression and implement practical solutions that will restore the public's faith in our election system," stated Luis Figueroa, legislative staff attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, MALDEF.

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