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Civil Rights Groups Issue Notice Letter to Florida State Election Officials to Ensure Displaced Voters Have Access to the Ballot Ahead of Midterm Elections

Letter cites concerns over lack of access to up-to-date information for voters displaced by Hurricane Michael

Tallahassee, FL— Today in a letter written to state officials, civil rights groups including Common Cause Florida, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, ACLU of Florida, ACLU National, and the Advancement Project National Office expressed concern about the impact of Hurricane Michael on the upcoming November election.

The letter, addressed to Ken Detzner Secretary of State, Maria Matthews Division Director, Elections, Paul Lux Supervisor of Elections, Brad McVay Interim General Counsel, and Gary Holland Assistant General Counsel, acknowledged the work of the County Supervisors of Elections and Florida officials in helping their communities after the devastating storm but also points to at least 16 counties – most in the Florida Panhandle – that experienced significant disruptions that could affect the ability of eligible voters to cast a ballot.

“In the aftermath of a disaster, information is the most vital thing, especially in taking care of your family,” says **Anjenys Gonzalez-Eilert**, the Executive Director of Common Cause Florida. “In the moment a resident whether present or absent focuses on the upcoming election, they need immediate answers. The Secretary of State and the Division of Elections are in the best position to make election information easily accessible as it aids the County Supervisors of Election in recovery.”

“The loss of lives and property wreaked by Hurricane Michael is horrible,” said **Julie Houk** Senior Special Counsel for the Voting Rights Project at the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. “But this toll should not be compounded by the additional loss of the intangible, but precious, right to vote. No voter should be stopped from registering to vote or from voting as a result of the storm. We urge Florida authorities to take every possible step to make sure that its voters can exercise this most sacred right. Floridians living in devastated areas are encouraged to contact the Election Protection hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE for support.”

“We are grateful for the tremendous effort Florida officials have poured into the recovery efforts from the devastation of Hurricane Michael,” said **Nancy Abudu**, legal director, ACLU of Florida. “But, we know that there should be a more comprehensive process in place to ensure every eligible Florida voter is able to vote in the general election. Right now, that process is scattered, ineffective and lacks the cohesiveness that’s needed to ensure Floridians impacted by Hurricane Michael get the information they need to be able to vote should they choose too. We are asking the SOS to consider the solutions we have offered to ensure that Floridians have every resource available to them so they are able to cast their ballots.”

“Florida can prevent widespread disenfranchisement by extending its voter registration deadline by a week to accommodate the tens of thousands of Floridians affected by Hurricane Michael. It is outrageous that it refuses to do so,” said **Julie Ebenstein**, senior staff attorney with the ACLU’s Voting Rights Project.

“We are calling on Florida state election officials to prevent further burden on Floridian voters by providing critical and reliable information to guarantee these voters’ right to vote is protected,” stated **Donita Judge**, Co-Program Director of Advancement Project national office's Power and Democracy Program. "This is an opportunity for the state government to put in place procedures that will sustain our democracy in the midst of a storm and guarantee the havoc wreaked in our communities is not exacerbated by inadequate responses by state government.”

Although Governor Scott has issued an Executive Order authorizing County Supervisors of Elections to expand early voting, civil rights groups worry that a piecemeal, county-by-county approach may further confuse voters who are already overwhelmed in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael. Pointing to the lack of access and information, the groups also indicated that they are particularly concerned about the current lack of a publicly available, centralized online hub where Florida’s voters can obtain accurate and up-to-date information about the upcoming election, including county-specific voting information. The letter suggests that the state’s Emergency Management website be used as a central hub for voting information for those areas affected by the storm.

[Read the full letter here.](#)

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