



November 2, 2006

Office of Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Dear Governor Ehrlich,

Common Cause strongly urges you to use your considerable influence with Republican leaders in your state and demand that the Maryland Republican Party withdraw a guide for party poll watchers that urges aggressive voter challenges, jeopardizing the rights of Maryland residents and U.S. citizens to cast their vote in next Tuesday's election. Common Cause also urges you to publicly disavow the guide.

Party poll watchers historically have had two duties at the polls: To observe how many voters show up, so that voters who have not made it to the polls can be reminded to vote, and to make sure that voters get treated decently. But this guide turns that advice on its head, instead counseling Republican poll watchers that their "most important duty" is to "challenge people who present themselves to vote but who are not authorized to vote." This message crosses the line between ensuring accountability and accuracy at the polls and encouraging voter intimidation.

The guide would create an army of intrusive election day observers, watching for the least deviation to indicate evidence of potential voter fraud, eager to challenge the eligibility of scores of voters. Even asking for help at the polls should raise suspicions, the guide advises. Some states actually have laws that prevent challenges that this guide encourages, restricting them to one voter or a voter the challenger actually knows.

No one wants voter fraud. But laws on the books already present substantial deterrents, making voting using a false identity a felony punishable by up to five years in jail and a \$10,000 fine. There can be no justification for the intimidating tactics this guide suggests. And there is no proof that voter fraud is rampant. Indeed, over the past four years, as 200 million votes were cast in federal elections, there have been only 86 convictions for federal voter fraud in the entire country.

As Governor, you have demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that every vote counts in Maryland. You endorsed state legislation requiring a voter-verified paper trail for election machines. And after problems with touch-screen machines and electronic poll books surfaced in Maryland's September primary, you were so concerned about voter confidence that you encouraged state officials to consider returning to old fashioned paper ballots and voters to use absentee ballots.

If voter confidence and ensuring that every vote counts remains your first priority, you can demonstrate true leadership by putting a halt to the distribution of this ill-intentioned and destructive guide.

Sincerely,

Chellie Pingree
President
Common Cause