



3/23/2022

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Aunna Dennis, and I am the executive director of Common Cause Georgia. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all; and empower all people to make their voices heard in the political process.

Common Cause Georgia commends the General Assembly for its attempt to correct some of the missteps of House Bill 202, passed during the Special Legislative Session earlier this year. However, House Bill 1464 contains many new provisions that are harmful to Georgians and the goal of fair elections.

We support the bill's provisions that would allow for extending time off for employees to allow for early voting and change the third-party ballot application disclaimer to make it less confusing voters. We also support the provision that would remove the requirement that by 10pm following the close of the polls on a primary, election, or runoff that counties report the total number of ballots cast, including provisional ballots. Rather by 10pm, counties need only report the number of early vote and absentee ballots that have been cast, rejected, and uncured. This would ease some of the burden on overworked election officials and provide them more time to reach ballot totals.

However, Common Cause Georgia opposes the many provisions in the bill that would add to the burdens of election officials, overextending their already limited time and resources. Many of the requirements included in H.B. 1464 are ambiguous as written and will be difficult for election officials to follow. Others, such as the added chain of custody requirements for absentee ballots, add yet another time-consuming burden on election officials. The requirements as written in the bill require sealing then unsealing in an impractical manner. Yet again, this bill does not effectively balance the ability of election officials to perform their essential duties with new requirements that will have little actual effect and do not actually further the goal of more secure elections.

Many members of Boards of Elections throughout our state and on-the ground election officials have voiced their concern about the bill's requirements. H.B. 1464 adds new burdens and simultaneously takes away potential resources. Not only is there no provision of additional funding from the state for the added requirements, but the bill would inhibit targeted donations to counties that help fund their services, further impairing cash strapped elections offices.



Georgia

Common Cause Georgia also opposes the provision of H.B. 1464 that would reduce the total number of voting machines from 1 for every 250 voters to 1 in every 250 voters *who have not yet voted*. A reduction in the number of available machines is a subtle voter suppression tactic, leading to longer lines at the polls and making it more difficult for Georgians to cast ballots. There is no justification for such a measure. Not only do we caution this body from reducing the number of voting machines, but we would also encourage an addition to the bill to provide for more emergency paper ballots, both on election day and during early voting. The current minimum requirement for the number of paper ballots is only 10% of the number of registered voters at each polling site – and this amount should be increased to ensure that Georgians still get to vote even in case of long lines or failures of voting systems. During the June 2020 primary elections, many polling locations ran out of emergency paper ballots – depriving voters of their ability to cast a ballot – and that should never be allowed to happen again. Compare the state of North Carolina, which requires emergency blank ballots equal to 50% of the number of registered voters. We urge the Senate to amend H.B. 1464 to include this commonsense fix.

Perhaps the most egregious component of H.B. 1464, as it is currently written, is the sweeping new authority given to the Georgia Bureau of Investigations over election activity. This bill proposes giving the GBI original jurisdiction to identify and investigate any so-called election violations, would allow the GBI to issue subpoenas to compel document production, allow them to conduct audits of documents, and allow them to compel individuals to obey subpoenas via the grant of an Order from the Superior Court. The Secretary of State's office is capable of handling investigations into voting. And the increased involvement of the GBI in elections could have a chilling effect on voters. Giving this authority to the GBI only adds fuel the disproven conspiracy narrative of widespread fraud in the 2020 election.

We encourage this Committee to serve the voters of our state and amend and remove provisions that would cause voter intimidation and obstacles.

Thank you,

Aunna Dennis