

New Jersey Citizens' Coalition on HAVA Implementation

MEDIA RELEASE

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Advocates Applaud New Jersey Election Reforms

Newark, NJ ... A coalition of civil rights, civic, and community organizations applauded the State Legislature's adoption of a package of bills that will make voting easier and more secure in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Citizens' Coalition on HAVA Implementation has been working on a number of election reforms over the past two years regarding the State's implementation of the federal Help America Vote Act, which was passed in response to some of the problems that emerged during the 2000 presidential election. In 2004, coalition members also collaborated on an extensive Election Protection Project and found that voters faced an array of barriers that prevented them from exercising their right to vote. The groups were delighted to see many of their recommendation enacted into state law. The attachments summarize the bills and list Coalition members.

Renée Steinhagen, executive director of NJ Appleseed, commented on a bill that will provide voter verified paper trails of all ballots cast, "New Jersey has made a first step toward ensuring that voters can feel secure that their votes will go to the candidates whom they selected. Now, we need to establish an audit system that will guarantee that the required paper record will be used to catch malfunctions – accidental or intended."

Another bill will use provisional ballots to correct voter registration errors. Problems occur when some voters have data entry errors in their names or addresses or their forms are lost entirely. Now, through the use of provisional ballots, voters will be able to correct their information at their polling site when they vote. According to Glenn D. Magpantay, staff attorney at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, "When voters have taken all the necessary steps to register to vote, but some error prevented their ballots from being counted, this measure will remedy this problem in future elections."

In addition, local election boards must now report on the total number of provisional ballots used in any election. This requirement will help determine how many votes were potentially lost through administrative error.

AALDEF also praised the new law that will provide translated postings of Voters' Bill of Rights. The new law requires the postings in languages that are spoken by 10% or more of the registered

voters in the election district. Although the law falls short of the Coalition's objectives to translate ballots and voting instructions, the new law will help voters know their rights.

Another new law addresses the need for better poll worker training. Now, local election boards must develop training manuals for poll workers and instructions on how to use voting machines for voters with guidelines provided by the State. Sandra Matsen, past president of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, said, "We are still seeking poll workers to be certified on an annual basis with uniform trainings across the state, nevertheless, the new law is a step in the right direction."

Finally, the Coalition praised another recently passed law that requires all polling sites beginning on January 1, 2006 to include at least one accessible voting machine for voters with disabilities. It is time that election officials understand that accessibility means accessible voting machines as well as accessible polling places.

Keith Jones, president of the NAACP of New Jersey, stated in reference to the latest round of voting legislation, "Early last month we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the federal Voting Rights Act. We now have another reason to celebrate."

Anne Barron, ACLU-NJ Ex-Offender Voting Rights project director, said, "The Coalition will monitor the implementation of these new laws and continue to monitor elections in New Jersey. We certainly hope that the problems we documented in the 2004 election will have been solved by some of these new laws."

Lauren Skowronski, Executive Director of Common Cause New Jersey stated that the bills that extend the voter registration deadline; using provisional ballot for voter registration, and using voter registration forms to declare party affiliation, "will help to make the registration and voting process easier and more accessible for voters throughout New Jersey. Anything that will increase voter turnout is a good thing!"

The Coalition intends this Fall to also press for improvements in the statewide voter data base to protect voters from exclusion due to administrative errors, regulations to ensure that counties will comply with current laws regarding the enfranchisement of citizens with prior convictions, and other legislation. They seek to (i) enable provisional ballots to be counted as valid across county lines, (ii) revamp the machine certification process, and (iii) establish an audit system to ensure that paper records are consistent with machine tallies.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF NEW JERSEY ELECTION REFORM BILLS
Supported by the Citizens Coalition on HAVA Implementation
Bills were signed into law on July 7 and 12, 2004

Translated Voter Bill of Rights, A32/S30/S2461

The Voter Bill of Rights will now be translated into any language that is spoken as the primary language of 10% or more of the registered voters in a particular district and will be distributed and posted in poll sites.

Voter Verified Paper Trails of Ballots, A33/S29/S2463

All voting machines, including electronic voting systems will now produce paper records of each voter's vote for him/her to view after casting a ballot.

Provisional Ballots to Correct Voter Registration Errors; and Extension of Voter Registration Deadline, A42/S2387

Provisional ballots will be used to register new voters and correct voter registration errors if some errors would otherwise prevent them from voting, to take effect in the next election. Voters may now register to vote up to three weeks, instead of a month, before the elections.

Voter Registration Form to Include Party Enrollment, A38/S2394

Voters may now declare or change political party affiliations on their voter registration forms. This is in addition to enrollment forms used in primary elections. Voters' current party enrollments will remain valid unless they submit new voter registrations requesting changes.

Stronger Protections in Absentee Ballots, A35/S1133/S2397/S1435

All those requesting or returning absentee ballots for voters, or assisting voters in completing absentee ballots, must now follow stricter identification requirements. Candidates for office are now barred from assisting voters in completing absentee ballots.

Poll Worker Trainings and Voting Machine Instructions for Voters, A36/S2396

Local boards of elections must now prepare and distribute training manuals for poll workers and instructions on how to use voting machines for voters. The instructions will be available on cards and posters at poll sites. The manual and instructions will both be available on state and local internet sites. Sample voting machines will also be available at polling sites when new types of voting machines are introduced.

Reporting on the Use of Provisional Ballots, A37/S976/S2395

Local boards of elections must now report on the total number of emergency and provisional ballots used in any election, including ballots that were not counted. This will help determine how many are not counted.

Increased Penalties for Voting Offenses, A39/S2393

Penalties are increased for tampering with voting machines, fraudulent attempts to vote or violating the secrecy of one's vote.

Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities, A45/S28/S2404 and S1387

All polling sites beginning on January 1, 2006 must include at least one disabled-accessible voting machine for voters with disabilities and requires all polling places to come into compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Statewide Voter Registration Database, A45/S28/S2404

No later than January 1, 2006, a statewide voter registration database will be established, with some safeguards to ensure that the database accurately preserves and secures the relevant information of every legally registered voter in the State.

NEW JERSEY CITIZEN'S COALITION ON HAVA IMPLEMENTATION

AARP-NJ
ACLU-NJ
ALLIANCE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES
ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND
ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL COALITION
BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE AT NYU LAW SCHOOL
COALITION FOR PEACE ACTION
COMMON CAUSE OF NEW JERSEY
DEMOS: A NETWORK FOR IDEAS AND ACTION
GARDEN STATE BAR ASSOCIATION
HISPANIC BAR ASSOCIATION OF NJ
KOREAN AMERICAN VOTERS' COUNCIL-NY/NJ
LATINO LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE OF NJ
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEW JERSEY
MONDAY MORNING PROJECT NETWORKS OF ATLANTIC, CAPE MAY,
BURLINGTON, CUMBERLAND, MORRIS, OCEAN, MIDDLESEX, MERCER,
ESSEX, SUSSEX, PASSAIC, GLOUCESTER, SOMERSET, HUDSON, BERGEN
REGIONAL, and UNION COUNTIES.
NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION. FUND
NAACP OF NJ
NAACP VOTER FUND-NJ
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN-NJ
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN OF NJ
NEW JERSEY ACORN
NEW JERSEY APPLESEED PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER
NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION ON CORRECTION
NEW JERSEY CITIZEN ACTION
NEW JERSEY COALITION FOR DEMOCRACY
NEW JERSEY PIRG
NEW JERSEY POLICY PERSPECTIVE
ORGANIZATION OF CHINESE AMERICANS-NJ CHAPTER
PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY, METRO-REGIONAL OFFICE
PEOPLE FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT
PROJECT VOTE
SPINA BIFIDA ASSOCIATION TRI-STATE REGION
SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERS OF TOMORROW
STATEWIDE PARENT ADVOCACY NETWORK OF NJ
UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF METROWEST NJ,
COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
YOUNG KOREAN AMERICAN SERVICE AND EDUCATION CENTER

(List complete as of September, 2005, however, not all coalition members endorsed voter verified paper trails.)