



February 7, 2017

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mr. Arturo Vargas

†deceased

The Honorable Gregg Harper
Chair, Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Brady
Ranking Member, Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Harper and Ranking Member Brady:

On behalf of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, I write to express our strong opposition to H.R. 634, which would terminate the Election Assistance Commission (EAC). The EAC plays an integral role in ensuring that our nation's elections are conducted in a sound, efficient and accessible manner. The NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates full Latino participation in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our constituency encompasses the more than 6,100 Latino officials serving at all levels of government, and includes Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. The NALEO Educational Fund is dedicated to ensuring that Latinos have an active presence in our democratic process, and to that end, we engage in a broad range of civil rights and election policy development and voter engagement efforts.

The EAC performs critical functions of promoting best practices in election administration and directing programs and services under the Help America Vote Act and the National Voter Registration Act. Throughout the EAC's history, Commissioners have achieved bipartisan cooperation in pursuit of a higher goal that urgently demands our attention at this moment in history: an inclusive and responsive democracy.

For as long as the EAC has been in existence, the NALEO Educational Fund has supported its efforts. In the course of reaching out to and assisting Latino voters with overcoming barriers to casting ballots, we have documented significant confusion and disenfranchisement resulting from inconsistent and inefficient election administration practices across varying jurisdictions. The research-based standards, guidelines and technical assistance promulgated by the EAC are an effective means of guaranteeing equal access to the polls to all qualified voters.

The wide array of successful EAC guidance, such as its Glossary of Key Election Terminology, has standardized the administration of federal elections and has helped foster more equal treatment of voters, regardless of where and when they cast ballots. EAC publications have served as a particularly invaluable resource for jurisdictions which are required by federal or state law to provide language assistance to language

minority voters, particularly those jurisdictions which do not have extensive experience with such voters and are just starting to develop their language assistance programs. In June 2016, the EAC convened election officials, voting experts and organizations familiar with the needs of language minority voters to highlight best practices for providing information to American voters who are not yet fully fluent in English. The EAC's work on best practices for language assistance helps jurisdictions save resources and operate elections more efficiently, because citizens can more easily understand and navigate the electoral process.

The EAC's language assistance efforts are particularly critical in light of the fact that pursuant to Census Bureau determinations in December 2016, the number of political subdivisions covered by the Voting Right Act's (VRA) requirements to provide language assistance during the electoral process increased by 15 since the previous determinations were made in October 2011. Many of these subdivisions will need the guidance provided by the EAC as they develop inclusive materials and procedures.

The EAC also serves every American voter by conducting research, collecting data, and sharing information among elected officials, the public, and interested organizations. One of the most important roles of the EAC is to adopt guidelines for voting systems; because of unfilled vacancies on the Commission that prevented it from operating with a quorum, the Commission went ten years, from 2005 until 2015, without publishing updated voting system guidelines. In the absence of the EAC's reliable guidance, local jurisdictions largely were unable to take advantage of significant advances in election technology, which hold the promise of making our elections more accessible to all voters. The EAC's renewed efforts at testing and certifying voting machines are helping jurisdictions address the looming crisis that aging and broken voting infrastructure represents. This work is sorely needed in the coming years: perhaps more than \$1 billion of new election equipment will be needed by 2020, according to an estimate based on the Brennan Center for Justice's interviews with election officials.

The problems encountered by voters in registering to vote and casting ballots also demonstrate that we need the EAC today as much as ever to ensure that elections evolve with our citizens' needs and our technical capacity to meet them. According to the Election 2016 national weekly tracking poll we conducted with Noticias Telemundo, 28% of Latinos registered to vote have experienced very long wait times at polling places, and 18% have experienced challenges with obtaining language assistance during the electoral process. In the Arizona March Presidential primary, Maricopa County significantly reduced polling locations, which resulted in long lines and voter confusion. In the 2016 general election, media reports indicated that citizens encountered long lines and malfunctioning voting equipment at polling sites across the nation.

The sound administration of our nation's election systems is particularly crucial for the Latino community, one of the nation's fastest growing electorates. According to Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends, the number of Latinos eligible to vote will continue to increase significantly during the next two decades, with Latino youth driving that growth, as 67,000 Latino citizens turn 18 each month. The strong nationally-relevant strategic thinking, vision and coordination provided by the EAC are crucial to ensure the full participation of this emerging electorate in America's political process, and the vitality and responsiveness of our nation's democracy. We urge you to reject H.R. 634, to ensure that

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the EAC can continue its important work of standardizing and modernizing election administration to improve access to the franchise for all Americans.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions about this letter, please do not hesitate to contact Rosalind Gold, Senior Director of Policy, Research and Advocacy, at rgold@naleo.org or 213-747-7606.

Sincerely,



Arturo Vargas
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Committee on House Administration
Congressional Hispanic Caucus
Congressional Hispanic Conference



NALEO
Educational Fund