



Florida PIRG



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Contact Info:

Ben Wilcox, LWV of FL (850) 544-4448

Brad Ashwell, Florida PIRG (850) 294-1008

Danielle Prendergast, ACLU of Florida (786) 363-2727

Josh Anijar, Florida AFL-CIO, (850) 228-9841

Senate Continues Campaign Against Voters

Senate Continues Campaign Against Voters: Today's Senate Budget Vote on Elections Legislation (CS/CS/ SB 2086) Illustrates Lack of Transparency and Disregard for Public Input

TALLAHASSEE – With less than two weeks of the Legislative Session remaining, the notion that the Legislature would be focused on creating jobs and on our economy continues to be nonexistent. Instead, the Legislature continues to radically change the State of Florida with little time for opposition to fully understand and question the actions they are undertaking. The Senate's actions continue to undermine the spirit of open government and citizen involvement in Florida.

Today's actions were no exception as another election bill (SB 2086) passed the Senate Budget Committee with a last minute strike-all amendment. The Senate did not stop there allowing the unseen strike-all amendment, but also limiting public testimony to only one person for 90 seconds.

"Passing a bill that will disenfranchise voters (namely student voters) out of committee without public testimony should be shocking. But this egregious act is strangely what we've come to expect out of legislature that seems drunken with power. To not take public testimony and deny the public their last opportunity to weigh in on a bill that will be so detrimental to the public's best interest is simply shameful," said Brad Ashwell, Democracy Advocate for Florida PIRG.

"This bill and the manner in which it was pushed through the process speak volumes about the disdain that some in the Florida Legislature have for the people. It is incontrovertible that this legislation will disenfranchise voters, make registering new voters much more difficult and place serious new hurdles on the rights of Floridians to amend their constitution. There has been no transparency, no citizen input and no democracy in this process and that is what elections will look like should this bill be signed into law" said Rich Templin, the Legislative and Political Director for the Florida AFL-CIO.

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Additionally, advocates for Florida PIRG and the League of Women Voters were told by committee staff that the number of cards filed by members of the public would not be available unless speakers spoke at the podium. Only after filing a FOIA request were the groups given access to the 39 cards filed by members of the public, some traveling from around the state, who were denied their opportunity to voice opposition to this bill in its last committee stop this legislative session.

Of the 39 speaking request cards filed, only one lobbyist wished to speak in favor of the bill and one public official wished to speak for informational purposes. Cards filed for public testimony yesterday largely mirrored those filed today with 39 being filed and only two being filed for informational purposes. Note that only one individual, a longtime industry lobbyist, planned to speak in favor of this bill.

“The Senate is supposed to be the more deliberative body,” said Ben Wilcox, government consultant for the League of Women Voters of Florida. “This bill was rammed through today with no chance for public comment or legislative debate.”

SB 2086 is a threat to the right to vote and will disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters in Florida. The manner of which this legislation has been rammed through the legislative process is neither transparent nor fair, making it a fitting environment to pass an undemocratic and anti-voter bill.

“Democracy is getting squeezed like a Florida orange,” said Danielle Prendergast, Director of Public Policy for the ACLU of Florida. “Voting, free speech and civic action should be encouraged and protected yet this proposal treats voter participation like some contagious disease that should be feared, contained and eradicated.”

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