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CONTACT: 614-280-1984, Bill Faith, Executive Director
Suzanne Gravette Acker, Communications Director

Proposed Federal Voter ID Bill Compared to “HB 3 on Steroids”

COLUMBUS - Election rights advocates and election law professionals combined efforts today to ask Senators DeWine and Voinovich to call on their leadership to drop consideration of H.R. 4844, the federal voter ID bill that threatens by 2010 to force all voters to prove citizenship on a photo ID before being allowed to vote. The measure passed the House last week in a party line vote of 228 to 196, and could make its way to a Senate vote by week’s end.

Speakers at a COHHIO-hosted press conference included Bill Faith, COHHIO executive director; Professor Daniel Tokaji, OSU Moritz College of Law; Sybil Edwards McNabb, Ohio Conference President, NAACP; and Peg Rosenfield, elections specialist with the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

Faith likened the proposed legislation to “Ohio’s HB 3 on steroids,” saying it’s “the most onerous ID requirement we’ve seen.” It’s a simple bill, he said, but tremendously complicated in its implementation. Currently, a \$97 passport is the only document that satisfies the requirements, and only 27 percent of people in this country have passports. The National Conference of State Legislators estimates the requirements would cost \$11 billion to implement. Ohio officials estimated the price at \$45 million to start and \$15 million to maintain annually, Faith said.

Daniel Tokaji, who has been tracking voter ID requirements across the country since the 2004 election, calls HR 4844 the “Hyde Voter Suppression Act,” in recognition of its sponsor (Henry Hyde, R-IL). He said the bill is “the worst of the worst,” even beating out Georgia’s voter ID law, which was recently enjoined by state and federal courts on the grounds that it’s a poll tax. Voters will be required to stand in long lines for documents that will not be provided free of charge, Tokaji said, “and that’s precisely what Rep. Hyde and his colleagues are hoping.”

Sybil Edwards McNabb said “the NAACP believes crucial voting rights should never depend on the unpredictable appropriations process.” In addition, McNabb lamented the fact that millions would be prevented from “participating in what we have fought so hard for; our sacredly-held and hard-won democratic process of voting. Adding insult to injury,” she said, “the bill would do little or nothing to prevent voter fraud.”

Elections specialist Peg Rosenfield noted the strain and cost to local boards of elections. “People will be required to check things like the accuracy and validity of IDs that they’re not qualified to check,” Rosenfield said. “This would prevent voters who’ve been actively engaged in the process for decades from being able to vote.”

“It has always been a tradition that the purview of elections administration is at the state level,” said Faith. “This Big Brother approach would change that tradition.”

175 S. Third St., Columbus, Ohio 43215

Ph: 614-280-1984 Fax: 614-463-1060

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