



Civil Rights Groups File Lawsuit to Ensure Floridians Impacted by COVID-19 Can Participate in Tuesday Primary Election

TALLAHASSEE, UNITED STATES, March 17, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A coalition of racial justice organizations [filed a lawsuit](#) in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida against Governor Ron DeSantis and Secretary of State Laurel M. Lee for refusing to make reasonable voting accommodations for Floridians impacted by COVID-19. In a motion submitted by [Dream Defenders](#), New Florida Majority, Organize Florida, [Advancement Project National Office](#), Demos, and LatinoJustice PRLDEF plaintiffs allege the state's failure to extend vote-by-mail deadlines, adjust early voting dates, and expand mail ballot transmission options amounts to a denial of critical voter opportunities in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The state's refusal to take reasonable emergency election measures will prevent Floridians from participating in Tuesday's presidential primary elections.

"Florida's presidential primary election is today and unless immediate action is taken by the state, millions of voters could be disenfranchised," said Rachel Gilmer, co-director of Dream Defenders. "Thousands of young people who anticipated voting on or near their college campuses were abruptly sent home last week and Florida's leadership has disregarded them entirely. Other states with primaries on Tuesday have shown leadership we have yet to see from Florida. We must extend the vote by mail deadline until March 27 or we run the risk of massive voter suppression this primary."

The complaint requests that Florida amend its vote-by-mail process by:

- Extending the deadline for people to request a vote-by-mail ballot to March 27th;
- Allowing voters to request ballots be sent to them via e-mail or fax consistent with military and overseas voter procedures;
- Allowing third-party individuals to collect ballots from those utilizing vote-by-mail and drop off these ballots at the drop boxes mentioned above; and
- Allowing voters to submit their ballot via fax.

"It's important for me to be able to mail my vote in because I need my voice to be heard this election," said Terriayna Spillman, a plaintiff in the suit, and a freshman at Bethune Cookman University in Daytona Beach. "Not allowing students to mail in our ballots will drive down youth turnout. I hope the state of Florida will do the right thing by extending the mail-in deadline."

"Approximately 112 polling places have been moved or consolidated including many at assisted living facilities," said Andrea Mercado, Executive Director of New Florida Majority. "We understand that these closures are to protect public health, but it will create confusion, make lines longer at existing locations and will force people to travel farther."

Racial justice groups also cited quarantine requirements of Floridians with COVID-19 and a reduction in the number of poll workers available for Election Day duties as major voting barriers. To ensure all voters are able to cast a ballot, the groups also demand the state;

- Contact all voters whose polling places have changed as a result of site relocations. Supervisors of Elections should also attempt to station a poll worker at each of the former voting

sites to alert voters that the polling place has changed;

- Permit voters to vote curbside with a paper ballot;
- Give poll workers discretion to permit voters from vulnerable populations (senior citizens, voters who are immunocompromised, etc.) to move to the front of the line of waiting voters; and
- Allow people utilizing vote-by-mail to submit their ballots at a variety of drop boxes, including drop boxes at polling sites that are not their precincts.

"As we face this pandemic, we must also safeguard our democracy and protect the right of Florida voters to cast a ballot. Our complaint today asks the federal court to order Governor Ron DeSantis and Secretary of State Laurel Lee to act swiftly and immediately," said Chiraag Bains, Director of Legal Strategies at Demos. "They must extend vote-by-mail and make other critical accommodations to stop massive voter suppression, which will fall hardest on the state's Black and Brown voters and its vulnerable populations."

"The state must move swiftly to protect Floridians' health and right to vote," said Judith Browne Dianis, Executive Director of Advancement Project National Office. "This is not business as usual. Floridians are entitled to have their voices heard this election, and it is imperative that the state provides voters with an array of options to cast their ballots."

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