

ALCEE L. HASTINGS  
23RD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
FLORIDA

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AND BUDGET PROCESS  
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DEMOCRATIC CHAIRMAN

SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0923**

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

- 2353 RAYBURN BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0923  
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-1313  
FAX: (202) 225-1171
- 2701 W. OAKLAND PARK BOULEVARD  
SUITE 200  
FT. LAUDERDALE, FL 33311  
TELEPHONE: (954) 733-2800  
FAX: (954) 735-9444
- DELRAY BEACH CITY HALL  
100 NW 1ST AVENUE  
DELRAY BEACH, FL 33444  
TELEPHONE: (561) 243-7042  
FAX: (561) 243-7327

[www.alceehastings.house.gov](http://www.alceehastings.house.gov)

Statement of the Honorable Alcee L. Hastings  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights  
**“New State Voting Laws II: Protecting the Right to Vote in the Sunshine State”**

**January 27, 2012**

Mr. Chairman, the foundation of our democracy was and continues to erode under a coordinated, systematic attack spanning the nation. Many state governments have threatened the integrity of our elections with recently enacted laws creating barriers to the polls and unnecessarily restricting voter registration. Florida Governor Rick Scott recently signed into law one such measure, HB 1355. That law limits access to the polls for minorities, seniors, and college students. It also makes early voting much more difficult and imposes unnecessarily burdensome regulations on voting registration groups.

These laws taking effect in Florida and across the country are problematic because they will disenfranchise minorities, seniors and college students, many of whom voted for President Obama in the 2008 election. For example, more than 21 million Americans lack a government ID, a disproportionate number of whom are low-income individuals, minorities and the elderly. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reports: “As many as 25% of African Americans of voting age lack government-issued photo ID, compared to only 8% of their white counterparts. Eighteen percent of Americans over the age of 65 do not have government-issued ID.”

These changes neither improve the election process nor make it more reliable or transparent in any way. Rather, they echo memories from a dark period in American politics when only the privileged few were permitted to vote, and Jim Crow laws were the order of the day. Because these election law changes have the same intent and consequences as voter suppression tools like the poll tax, the new laws are effectively an end-run around Constitutional protections.

The Republican-controlled state legislatures that enacted these laws are deliberately taking the vote away from voters whose votes they don't like. These states are unequivocally recreating offenses from an embarrassingly wrong-headed point in our country's history. Nearly five decades after the elimination of the poll tax, we should be striving to make access to the polls easier, not harder.

Finally, I consider it a privilege to be able to submit my testimony for the record before this Senate Subcommittee. I only wish I were able to similarly testify before one of the Committees in the House with jurisdiction over this issue. Despite a record number of bills restricting the vote enacted last year, the Republican-led House of Representatives has held no hearings in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. Back in November, I, along with almost 40 other Democrats, sent a letter to the House Judiciary Committee and Committee on Oversight and Government Reform requesting a hearing on these practices.

Responsibility seems to only extend to one side of the Capitol on this issue. Not only is there still no hearing scheduled, I have yet to receive a response from either Chairman Lamar Smith or Chairman Darrell Issa. Therefore, I thank the Subcommittee for holding this critically important hearing and calling greater attention to this matter.

Mr. Chairman, while great strides have been made to improve our elections in recent years, problems still persist. Continued efforts to suppress the rights of voters not only threaten our democracy, but also the integrity of our elections. It is time for this to change. If these efforts are allowed to move forward, they will have a devastating effect on our democratic process all across the nation.