



TESTIMONY BY JUST DEMOCRACY ILLINOIS COALITION
BEFORE THE ILLINOIS HOUSE ELECTIONS & CAMPAIGN FINANCE COMMITTEE
REGARDING AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION IMPLEMENTATION
MAY 1, 2018

Chairperson Tabares, Spokesperson Fortner, honorable members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Just Democracy Illinois is a broad-based and diverse non-partisan coalition that works to protect and promote the value of a single vote, no matter the geographic, racial, ethnic, or party affiliation of the voter. The Just Democracy Illinois steering committee includes Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Chicago, CHANGE Illinois, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, Chicago Votes, Common Cause Illinois, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights, and Illinois Public Interest Research Group. Our campaign for Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) was endorsed by a diverse constituency of over 65 organizations from around Illinois. Accordingly, we are submitting this testimony regarding AVR implementation even though we do not support or oppose House Bill 4749 (HB 4749).

We appreciate the opportunity to work on an ongoing basis with the staff of the Illinois State Board of Elections ("State Board"), legislators, and state agency staff responsible for the implementation of AVR. The members of our coalition played a critical role in crafting and passing Illinois Public Act 100-46 ("the AVR statute"), and we are proud of the universal bipartisan support that the legislation earned. That level of support was only possible through ongoing conversations and negotiations with stakeholders such as the State Board, the Secretary of State's office, and other agencies. Before, during, and after the law was signed, our coalition has said that it is our hope that this spirit of collaboration and problem-solving would continue.

Since the law was enacted in 2017, we have said that to fulfill the promise of AVR, Illinois government leaders must implement the law in a strong, timely, and community-centered manner. Unfortunately, it does not appear that Illinois will meet the July 1, 2018 statutory deadline for opt-out registration at Driver Services facilities, which is the action that will make registration "automatic" for a huge number of Illinois voters. The Secretary of State's office has said that they expect to implement opt-out registration, the cornerstone of AVR implementation, by January 2, 2019.

It is our understanding that this delay is due to the Secretary of State's office's decision to seek an additional extension of time to implement REAL ID beyond what was contemplated when the AVR statute was passed. Although our coalition attempted to determine what, if anything, could have been done to ensure that the AVR statute was implemented in a timely fashion, we were unsuccessful.

We appreciate that the State Board of Elections has embraced its mandate to take feedback on implementing AVR, not only from the advocacy community but also from the broader public. We are disappointed that no other implementing state agency has so far participated in the public hearings, and we encourage them to participate in the final public hearing in Chicago. As the planned launch of electronic opt-in registration at Drivers Services approaches this summer, we encourage the Secretary of State's office to redouble their efforts to work with the advocacy community and members of the public to ensure the building blocks of AVR are implemented well. As we have stated in prior testimony, unless the communities of eligible voters who have historically been excluded from our election system are at the table during all phases of AVR implementation, we all risk repeating past mistakes and failing to truly improve voting and civic engagement in Illinois.

Our goal continues to be for AVR to be implemented well and on time. We are not advocating for an overly rushed process prone to error, but we should also not be willing to accept unnecessary and unexplained delays, especially if there is not clarity and commitment around new deadlines. Just Democracy Illinois is a group of non-partisan community stakeholders, policy professionals, and attorneys. We are open to the idea of amending the AVR statute to reflect new realities about implementation, but we do not think that HB 4749, as drafted, accomplishes our collective goals.

We appreciate Representative Fortner's ongoing dedication to AVR and his openness to finding a solution for improved timeliness of implementation. However, we are concerned that HB 4749 may result in further delays of opt-out registration at Driver Services. Additionally, our understanding is that the Secretary of State is, importantly, still planning to hit certain benchmarks by July 1, 2018, such as informing every applicant of their current voter registration status and making electronic opt-in registration an option at Driver Services. For these reasons, we do not support removing implementation deadlines from the statute and reducing accountability. If the General Assembly makes changes to the AVR statute regarding timeline, those changes should serve to facilitate timely implementation, not further delay.

The Just Democracy Illinois coalition appreciates the great challenges that state agencies face, especially given the lack of a state budget for several years. The level of enthusiasm for AVR across the state is a resource for implementing agencies and can be called upon to overcome the inevitable obstacles that arise in the implementation process. Whether it is technical expertise, advice from agency staff in other states, or advocacy for the monetary resources that agencies need to complete implementation well and on time, Just Democracy Illinois is prepared to help.

Our coalition specifically requests the following:

1. Details from the Secretary of State's office explaining what else, if anything, it needs to implement opt-out registration (the cornerstone of AVR), the date by which implementation is expected to occur, and whether there will be additional delays;
2. Details from all implementing agencies about whether there will be additional delays to AVR implementation compared to the deadlines listed in the statute; and

3. Consideration by all implementing agencies of input from community stakeholders on AVR prototypes and drafts, well before such materials are launched and released to the public, as well as ongoing opportunities for communities to provide input and remain actively engaged with the implementation process.

Once again, the Just Democracy Illinois coalition appreciates this opportunity to provide input here as well as other opportunities such as at the State Board's ongoing public hearing process. Community stakeholders deserve a seat at the table with all agencies implementing AVR. We ask that they commit to work with us, so that together we can meaningfully improve civic participation in Illinois.