



CHICAGO LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
Public Comments at Hearing on Automatic Voter Registration
May 23, 2018

Good Afternoon, and thank you to Chairwoman Hernandez of the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, Illinois State Board of Elections Member Casandra Watson, and the Illinois Secretary of State's Office for co-hosting this hearing on AVR implementation. My name is Julie Justicz, I'm an attorney with Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that has worked to secure racial equity and economic opportunity for all, since our founding in 1969.

Our Voting Rights Project, led by Ami Gandhi, has a long and proud history of working to promote and protect the right to vote for all Americans, especially those who have been historically disenfranchised because of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin or economic status. We are honored to serve as a steering committee member of the Just Democracy Illinois Coalition. And we are thankful for the leadership of the other steering committee members, including Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago, CHANGE Illinois, Chicago Votes, Common Cause Illinois, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and Illinois PIRG, and for the many powerful voices for democracy and enfranchisement here today.

The passage of Automatic Voter Registration is an important and historic move intended to improve the fairness and accuracy of voter registration in Illinois. The new law—and more importantly, the effective and timely implementation of the new law—offer all Illinoisans a promise. The promise is that eligible voters will now become registered automatically when they come into contact with state agencies for other services, such as getting a state ID or renewing a drivers' license. In the coming years, people accessing state services such as unemployment insurance or SNAP will also have the opportunity to register on site.

Why is this so important? There has long been a voter registration gap that blocks communities of color from accessing the ballot in equal numbers as white voters. Over the years, intentional registration barriers became enshrined in our registration systems. Even if at some point those barriers became unintentional, the disenfranchisement of people of color continues. AVR has the tremendous promise of removing many of those historic barriers. Consider that in Oregon, the first state to pass AVR legislation, early findings indicate that the rate of registrations at the state's DMV quadrupled in the months after implementation. Thousands of new voters were able to cast ballots as a result. Here in Illinois, AVR has the potential to be even more inclusive and innovative than in other states, but only if implementation is strong, timely, and community-centered.

To meet the promise of the AVR law in Illinois, state agencies charged with administering it must act swiftly and with accuracy. As advocates, we are concerned that the Secretary of State's Office has already indicated that it will not meet the original statutory deadline for full AVR



implementation at its Driver Services facilities on July 1, 2018. Full implementation requires that applicants opt-out of voter registration; the shift from opting in to vote to opting out is where AVR will likely have the greatest impact. But now, according to the Secretary of State's recent comments, applicants will have to wait until January 2019 to benefit from the opt-out requirement of the law. Timing is important. Make that critically important. Other state agencies including IDES and IDHS are expected to begin registration of applicants for their services in July of 2019. Any delay of implementation during the early phases of roll-out means continued disenfranchisement for long marginalized populations. That is why we are asking all state and local agencies here today to dedicate the resources necessary to meet the law's requirements. Time lost to implementation delays means thousands of votes lost with each passing election cycle.

Chicago Lawyers' Committee, our Just Democracy Steering Committee partners, and members of affected communities are all ready to work with state and local agency personnel to assist with implementation efforts—to ensure that community voices are included, and that registration barriers are removed. We are grateful for the hard work that many agency board members and staff have already put into the implementation process, including the voices we have heard from today. We appreciate the Secretary of State's office and State Board of Elections recently considering input from our organization and numerous community partners regarding a sign that will be placed at driver's license facilities.

Other aspects of AVR implementation where community input would be helpful include input on the user experience of the voter registration process at agencies, service applications, and interactions with agency personnel. We all would also appreciate opportunities to learn about personnel training, tracking of data, and oversight systems to ensure compliance. Working together, we can make Illinois a shining example of voter registration access and accuracy.

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