

EAC Public Meeting-Denver, Minneapolis

April 16, 2008

Status update on the Winner's Circle Communication report on the Implications of HAVA's ID Requirements on First-time Voters Who Register by Mail

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Testimony**

Commissioners, Mr. Wilkey and General Counsel Hodgkins, I come before the Commission today to introduce Meredith Imwalle, president of Winner's Circle Communications, who will describe the findings from her 12-month inquiry into first time voters who register to vote by mail. For its contract with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Winner's Circle was charged with creating a series of case studies highlighting the impact on states of HAVA's ID requirements on first-time voters who register by mail and conducting several focus groups assessing the impact on voters directly.

Section 244 of the Help America Vote Act requires the Election Assistance Commission to conduct a study of the impact of section 303(b) on voters who register by mail. Specific areas of the study must include 1) an examination of the impact of section 303(b) on first time mail registrant voters who vote in person, including the impact of this section on voter registration; 2) an examination of the impact of section 303(b) on the accuracy of voter rolls, including preventing ineligible names from being placed on voter rolls and ensuring that all eligible names are placed on voter rolls; and, lastly, 3) an analysis of the impact of section 303 (b) on existing State practices, such as the use of signature verification or attestation procedures to verify the identity of voters in elections for Federal office, along with an analysis of other changes that may be made in order to improve the voter registration process, such as verification or additional information on the registration card.

In developing a Request for Proposal for a contractor to conduct this study, EAC was mindful of the potential difficulties in collecting data regarding first time voters who register by mail. With the enactment of HAVA states were, for the first time, now required to implement a series of identification requirements that previously had not been mandatory. In order to gain a clear picture of the impact of implementing section 303(b) EAC staff thought it important, from a methodological standpoint, to select a variety of states with diverse populations (e.g. by age, income, race, national origin, geographic location, and population density). Further criteria used for selecting states to research, included choosing those states that have chosen to adopt the requirement as either a floor or a ceiling (that is, as a minimum or maximum requirement.) Finally, to reliably understand and measure the impact of the section, only those states that were found to have a top-down voter registration database system in place were selected for study.

The contractor, Winner's Circle Communications, is to be commended for its successful efforts to collect these data. It gathered background information through the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey and all of the states' election codes, prior to

conducting preliminary interviews with the states to determine each state's experience with implementation of the requirement. The contractor's research verified what EAC staff knew entering into the study: many states do not collect data specifically about first-time voters who register by mail. The research criteria described above, that were necessary to make the study methodologically sound, made the universe of possible states to include in the study and voters to interview for the focus groups, small. I am confident that Winner's Circle employed sound principles in its effort to assist EAC with complying with the requirements set forth in HAVA Section 244. In a moment, Ms. Imwalle will elaborate on these requirements as they affected her research, along with the important and valuable findings that were discovered about these voters and states' administration of the requirement.

In closing, I believe that the work that was accomplished through this contract is quite good, the research methodologies employed were sound and, that the findings from the case studies and the focus groups will be helpful to the elections field as we seek to find ways to better serve this category of voters and to implement the HAVA requirement.

I recommend that after the EAC Commissioners have had the opportunity to ask Ms. Imwalle questions about her study and its findings, that you consider adopting a final version at our next public meeting.

Thank you.