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June 2, 2020

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland,

I write to draw your attention to recent Florida state laws that make it more difficult for Floridians to legally cast their ballots. The Department should consider using all available authorities and resources to protect the rights of Florida voters.

For decades, Florida permanently disenfranchised returning citizens, even those who had long-completed their sentences. Decisions regarding restoring voting rights were left to the state's Executive Clemency Board, which under many Governors restored only a fraction of clemency applications. While I was proud that, under my Governorship, the Board restored voting rights to a record 155,315 Floridians, it was clear that this shameful holdover of the Jim Crow-era needed to change.

In 2018, 65% of Floridians voted overwhelmingly to adopt the Voting Restoration Amendment, also known as Amendment 4, to restore voting rights to 1.5 million Floridians who had completed their sentences. However, against the clear will of Florida voters, politicians in Tallahassee refused to implement Amendment 4, deciding instead to deny Floridians of their civil rights until they paid all outstanding legal financial obligations – a poll tax by another name.

In response to lies about the 2020 election, the Florida legislature increased its assault on voting rights by passing S.B.90, a law designed to disproportionately impact working class Floridians, Black and Hispanic communities, and voters with disabilities. It places burdensome requirements on people looking to register to vote and cast their ballot, including limiting drop box availability, purging the voter rolls, and requiring voter ID or a Social Security number to even request a mail ballot. S.B.90 will have its intended effect – longer lines at overcrowded polling places and greater difficulty voting for seniors, people with disabilities, and hardworking Floridians.

S.B.90 also places severe restrictions on voter registration groups and get-out-the-vote efforts, hurting many Floridians who take pride in their civic duties and also rely on friends, neighbors, and church families to cast their vote. In addition, it requires groups to mislead voters and tell

them they might not submit a voter's registration on time. It imposes penalties on people who submit mail-in-ballots for non-immediate family members. It even makes it a crime to give people water who are waiting in long voting lines in the hot, Florida sun!

On April 25, 2022, Governor DeSantis signed into law S.B.524. In addition to increasing the criminal severity of submitting ballots of non-family members from a misdemeanor to a felony, it established the Office of Election Crimes and Security under the Florida Department of State. The Office has the authority to pursue investigations into potential violations and "elections irregularities". S.B.524 also requires the Governor to send out special officers of law enforcement, or election police, across the state to investigate alleged violations of election law.

These new investigators and the elections police will be under the control of the freshly appointed Secretary of State Cord Byrd, a politician who has described himself as a member of the violent extremist group, Proud Boys, and whose wife publicly subscribes to the dangerous QAnon conspiracy. In addition, Secretary Byrd has parroted lies about the 2020 election. The ability of the Governor's appointed Secretary of State and their officials to investigate whatever, or whoever, they decide under the guise of "election irregularities" is purposefully vague and undefined, and provides those under the purview of the Governor's office with unilateral authority and virtually no guardrails -- even a Governor who is on the ballot.

The recent legislation and rhetoric coming out of Tallahassee paints an alarming picture -- hostility for the voting rights guaranteed to all Floridians under the United States Constitution. America has come a long way from poll taxes, literacy tests, and open intimidation and suppression of minority groups. But in the Sunshine State, what were whispers of Jim Crow-era voter suppression have become a foreboding roar.

I request your consideration in using all available resources and authorities granted to you by Congress to protect the right to vote of Floridians in the upcoming August primary and November general elections. Thank you for your full and fair consideration of this matter, consistent with all applicable agency guidelines, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN