



Testimony to the Senate State Affairs Committee Opposing SB 823

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Chairman Hughes and Members of the Senate State Affairs Committee, I, Luis Figueroa, Chief of Legislative Affairs, on behalf of Every Texan (formerly CPPP) oppose SB 823.

According to the United States Election Project, Texas has one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the country, turning out 42.5% of its population of eligible voters in 2022 compared with a national average of 46.6%. We need reforms and policy change that increases access to the polls and supports county election officials in that effort. We do not need laws that will restrict, discourage, or threaten county election officials. SB 823 will do exactly that. It will cause more bumps in the road for county election officials who are simply trying to fulfill their obligations under the law.

Decrease in Election Confidence

At a time in our election history where there are concerns about fair elections, passing a bill like SB 823 could further the lack of confidence that Texas voters have in our elections. According to an article published by NPR, this lack of confidence has led election workers, specifically administrators and their staff, to quit because of reasons that include harassment.¹ This bill will only further the possible mistrust that voters will have for current and future election administrators. This could lead to our inability to have qualified officials who want to take on positions within our election system, which is so vital to our democratic process.

Disparate Impact on Urban Counties

Harris County, Texas' biggest county, which according to the Secretary of State had 2,568,463 registered voters in 2022 could endure big harm from this bill. The bill mentions "recurring patterns of problems with elections administration," but there is no definition for recurring in the bill language. The lack of clarity opens up the potential for abuse and inequitable enforcement against larger counties, where irregularities may recur just based on numbers alone. There could be a potential for this bill to be politically weaponized to remove officials based on the results of the elections rather than any wrongdoing.

Recommendation:

Solutions to voting irregularities will come as a result of additional resources and working with local county officials to ensure that voting is safe and accessible for all voting-eligible Texans. This should be accomplished through a collaborative process that includes many communities and counties and not one that comes with threats and state interference. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to oppose SB 823.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/19/1118527241/texas-gillespie-county-election-officials-quit-threats>