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Civil Rights and Civic Engagement Groups Applaud Georgia Secretary of State's Decision to End 90-Day Black-Out Period

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 25, 2016 – The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee), along with Georgia civil rights and civic engagement organizations, including the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP, New Georgia Project, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta, and Georgia Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda, applaud the decision of the Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp to end a policy which deferred the processing of voter registration applications during the 90-day period between the close of registration for the state primary and nonpartisan general elections until the completion of the runoff elections at the end of July.

That policy, also known as the "90-day black-out period," was originally adopted to prevent ineligible voters who registered after the voter registration deadline from casting ballots in the state's May primary and nonpartisan general election.

"Voter registration forms should be processed swiftly and timely," said Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "With the advent of the state's electronic voter registration database and electronic poll books, the state's 90 black-out period was unnecessary since county election officials have the electronic tools available to quickly identify whether a voter met the voter registration deadline for a particular election. After Georgia grassroots organizations alerted us to this issue, the Lawyers' Committee began a dialogue with the secretary of state's office and we were able to successfully advocate for the termination of this policy."

“What was particularly bad about this policy was that eligible Georgians who registered to vote after the close of registration in April did not receive any information about the status of their voter registration or if there were problems with their registration forms until August or even months later,” said Francys Johnson, president of the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP. “This delay gave applicants very little or no time to correct any problems before the close of registration for the general election.”

According to Stephanie Cho, interim executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta, “this processing delay imposed significant additional burdens on applicants with limited English proficiency since the deficiency notices issued to applicants who failed the application process were in English only and applicants may not have understood the urgency of correcting problems with their applications in time to vote in the general election.”

“Most voter registration applicants were unaware that the policy even existed,” said Helen Butler, executive director of the Georgia Coalition for the Peoples’ Agenda. “They had no idea that their applications would languish unprocessed with thousands more across the state for three months or more. The delayed processing of the applications also prevented some voters from receiving precinct cards with the location of their polling place before the general election,” said Butler. “Since the secretary of state’s “My Voter Page” crashed during the morning of the 2014 general election, voters without precinct cards were in some instances unable to find the location of their polling place. The termination of this policy will help facilitate the timely issuance of precinct cards to new registrants.”

New Georgia Project, an organization that conducts large scale voter registration drives in Georgia, anticipates 2016 will be a banner year for voter registration in Georgia given the interest in the presidential election and believes that the number of newly registered voters in 2016 will top the 570,655 who registered in Georgia during the 2012 Presidential election cycle.

“We want to make sure that every eligible Georgian who submits a timely and complete voter registration application makes it onto the voter registration rolls and can cast a ballot in November,” said Nse Ufot, executive director of the New Georgia Project. “The termination of this policy is a good thing for Georgia voters and should also ease the backlog of unprocessed applications experienced by the county election officials moving forward. It is a win-win for all concerned and will hopefully be embraced enthusiastically by county election officials. While we might not always see eye-to-eye with the secretary of state’s office on voter registration issues, we do give the secretary of state credit when he takes positive action to help improve the voter registration process in Georgia.”

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About the Lawyers’ Committee

The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers’ Committee), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. Formed over 50 years ago, we continue our quest of “Moving America Toward Justice.” The principal mission of the Lawyers’ Committee is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice under law, particularly in the areas of fair housing and community development; employment; voting; education; environmental justice; and criminal justice. For more information about the Lawyers’ Committee, visit www.lawyerscommittee.org.

About the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP

Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. The Georgia NAACP has had an unbroken presence in Georgia since 1917. The Georgia NAACP maintains a network of branches throughout Georgia, from cities to small rural counties. The Georgia NAACP has been the most effective and consistent advocates for civil and human rights in Georgia. The NAACP’s half-million adult and youth members throughout the United States and the

world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors. <http://www.naacpga.org/>.

About the New Georgia Project

Register. Engage. Advocate. www.newgeorgiaproject.org.

About the Georgia Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda

Voting is a sacred right and a moral obligation.