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CONTACT: Deb Greenspan

dgreenspan@gpgdc.com

202-741-5573

Senate Examines Voting Problems from 2008 Election: Registration-Related Issues Are Most Costly and Burdensome

Nation's Largest Voter Protection Coalition Releases 2008 Report

WASHINGTON, March 11, 2009— The American system of voter registration, stuck in its early 19th century roots, urgently needs modernization to increase efficiency, save taxpayer dollars, reduce the burden on election officials and prevent eligible voters from being turned away from the process, according to testimony before the Senate Rules Committee today by Jonah Goldman, Director of the National Campaign for Fair Elections at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Goldman and other voting rights experts testified that the thousands of problems seen in the 2008 and earlier elections will continue unless the outdated paper-based voter registration process is upgraded.

Goldman's testimony is based on a new study released today by Election Protection, the largest non-partisan voting rights coalition in the nation, which Goldman directs. [*Election Protection 2008: Helping Voters Today, Modernizing the System for Tomorrow*](#) analyzes more than 200,000 problems and questions reported to Election Protection's voter assistance hotline and collected by more than 10,000 volunteers nationwide during the general election cycle. More than 30% of all problems tracked by Election Protection stemmed from voter registration issues.

"The voter registration system we use today was created by the Whig Party in the early 1800s, when Americans were still writing with quill feather pens," Goldman said. "Like the Whig Party, our registration system should be a relic of the past. It is inefficient; it sets election officials up for failure by diverting resources and energy from crucial tasks and it prevents more eligible voters from casting a ballot than any other part of the election process."

Solutions, Goldman said, are neither expensive nor complicated. "Modernizing our voting system will save states millions of dollars while making the system more efficient and easier to navigate," he said. "Election officials are overburdened, and without upgrades the system will struggle to support the weight of growing participation."

According to the Election Protection report, a significant portion of election problems stem from the outmoded paper-based system that requires voters to complete forms by hand and mail them to a local elections board. The election administrators then must decipher the form, enter the data into a

database, and mail back a registration card. This time consuming process is further complicated when officials are overwhelmed by last minute applications. New York City, for example, received 211,866 new registration applications in the final 10 days of the registration period in 2008, as compared to 195,136 in the nine months prior and 146,147 in the year before.

Unprocessed applications, mistakes on the voter rolls and confusion at the polling place left thousands of voters frustrated, slowed long lines on Election Day and cost states millions of dollars in administrative needs.

With a modernized, computer-based system, purging, registration errors and provisional balloting problems would not occur. It would also eliminate the role of third party registration drives which have raised questions about fraud in the past.

The savings would also be significant, Goldman said. According to election officials, small jurisdictions, like Forsyth County, Georgia, will save hundreds of thousands of dollars. Those savings grow to over \$1 million in medium size jurisdictions like Franklin County, Ohio and are in the multi-million dollar range in large counties like Los Angeles.

“The burden on state budgets, election officials and voters in 2008 is too great to ignore,” said Goldman. “We urge Congress to upgrade the voter registration system before the next political season gets in the way. This change will strengthen our democracy, aid the thousands of dedicated election officials across the country, save valuable resources for states facing budget shortfalls, and improve the process for voters.”

[Election Protection 2008: Helping Voters Today, Modernizing the System for Tomorrow](#), examines voting inquiries and problems from nine states across the country, and offers solutions to registration, polling place, and other common barriers that eligible voters face when casting their ballot. The report is available online at www.866ourvote.org.

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Election Protection is the nation's largest nonpartisan voter protection coalition, led by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Through its 1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline (1-866-687-8683) and dedicated team of trained experts and volunteers, Election Protection helps all American voters, including traditionally disenfranchised groups, gain access to the polls and overcome obstacles to voting, offering live assistance. The coalition has more than 100 partners at the national, state and local level and is providing live voter protection services now through Election Day for all 50 states. For more information about Election Protection and the 1-866-OUR-VOTE Hotline, please visit:

www.866ourvote.org.