

Reasonable Elections Processes Protect Florida Voters

By Kurt S. Browning, Florida Secretary of State

In recent days, the State of Florida has been characterized as restrictive in registering people to vote and in our voting processes. As Secretary of State, I can tell you that this is simply not true.

Our goal and mission is to register all Floridians who are eligible to vote, to make sure every eligible voter can cast their ballot on Election Day, and to ensure their ballot will be counted.

The Florida Department of State and local supervisors of elections share the mutual goal of registering all eligible individuals so that they can be a part of Florida elections.

As Secretary of State, it is my responsibility to defend, in court, the election laws of the state and several recent lawsuits have challenged Florida's voter registration processes.

One of the laws being challenged provides deadlines for persons or organizations collecting voter registrations for others. It originally passed in 2005 and then was revised in 2007. Bear in mind, Florida agencies that accept voter registrations, such as driver's license offices, public assistance offices and public libraries, are required to forward voter registration forms to their local supervisor of elections within 5 days. Third-party voter registration organizations are required to turn in the registrations that they collect within 10 days or face certain penalties.

Before the Department of State can enforce any penalties for not following the statutory deadlines, this law is clear that a rule to administer the third party voter registration process must be in place. The rulemaking process includes numerous opportunities for public input which is vital to developing a rule.

When a third party organization accepts someone's voter registration application and agrees to submit it on their behalf, they are holding the applicant's right to vote in their hand. If the registration is not turned in before key deadlines, they have kept that person from exercising their right to vote. Having reasonable submission requirements and penalties for not following those requirements is the least the State can do to protect the applicant who has entrusted his or her right to vote to a third-party.

Another case currently in the courts involves Florida's voter registration verification process. The voter registration process is the gateway for citizens to enter the voting process. The State is responsible for ensuring Florida has accurate voter information and our voter registration verification process is critical in making sure that fraudulent applicants do not get through that gate. Applications that are not verified at the state level are forwarded to local supervisors of elections for further investigation and resolution. The local supervisor notifies the voter of any discrepancies and gives the voter the opportunity to correct any errors on their application. Every effort is made to process voter registration applications accurately and in a timely manner.

Local supervisors of elections and the Department of State are dedicated to giving Florida citizens convenient and easy opportunities to register to vote and to vote on Election Day.

However, I believe we need to continue to work hard in making sure that state voter rolls have a great degree of integrity and accuracy.

As Secretary, I am fighting for your right to vote and making sure your vote counts.