

Andrea Gyger

From: Evelyn Hanssen [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, July 27, 2012 12:34 PM
To: Andrea Gyger
Subject: Comment on proposed changes to election rules

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Categories: Rules

To: Scott Gessler, Secretary of State
Re: Proposed Changes to Election Rules

From: Evelyn Hanssen
Date: July 27, 2012

I attended the hearing on the proposed changes in voting regulations, as a private citizen. It was very informative on both sides. However, there was a perspective that I thought was missing and I wanted to share that here.

I am a teacher at Thornton High School and work with lots of low-income students and families. I heard you say that it should not be a hardship for people who were categorized as inactive voters to either change their status or go to the polls on election day. That is true for educated, middle class folks. They can get on line and make the change. Many of the families I work with do not have internet access at home and lack digital skills. Making this option not available over the phone creates an added burden. But even understanding the need to change their status is something that requires some sophistication. As folks pointed out at the hearing, these people checked that they wanted to be on a permanent list to receive a mail-in ballot. It is confusing to many of us why this would not be honored. The other option of just going to the polling place is not always as easy as it sounds, either. Many of these folks do manual labor, and if they are on a job that runs late or is far from their home, they are unlikely to even see it as an option to walk off the job to go vote. Others work multiple jobs and may literally not have time to stand in line to vote. And for many families, childcare needs presents a huge challenge to standing in line at a polling place. You may not intend to disenfranchise these folks, but these policies will have that effect for many people.

I have chosen to work and live in an area with working class people. As I talk to many of my educated, middle and upper-middle class friends, they really don't understand what life is like for poor and working class people. Among other things, they assume a lack of responsibility --- and while that exists everywhere, most of the working class adults I encounter are hardworking people who try to do the right thing and take good care of their children. During the hearing, I felt a profound lack of understanding and empathy with regard to the life experience of less privileged folk. You are the Secretary of State for all the people. I implore you to take the needs of these people into account --- over and above concerns about consistency within the system.

The last point I want to make is with regard to perception. You took offense to people referring these measures as voter suppression. But with all the cynicism around politicians and political parties, it is not surprising that people make that assumption. When changes in voting rules in Pennsylvania are followed by the comment by a politician that those

changes will allow Mitt Romney to win the state, you can understand where the cynicism comes from. And the fact that all these voting rule changes are being proposed just before a highly contested Presidential election, adds to that perception. All of us, politicians and citizens alike, need to do what we can to promote civic engagement --- voting and more. Many people no longer believe that voting matters. Throwing in more obstacles to the process just enhances this perception and leads to the continuing decline of our democracy.

I request that you reconsider these new rules, and at the very least wait until after the election to put any changes in place. At that time, the legislature could be engaged in the process. That seems to be a more appropriate course of action.