



TCRP Voting Rights Program 2021 Legislative Priorities

With our democracy tested as never before, it must be a priority of the 87th Texas Legislative Session to work to ensure that every eligible Texan can cast a ballot that is fairly and accurately counted. But too many of our state's laws haven't been updated for the 21st Century, and make it too hard to vote without making our elections any more secure. The Texas Legislature can and must take a number of steps this year to modernize our elections and renew the vitality of our state's democracy.

- **No new voter suppression laws:** Texas is already one of the hardest places to vote in the entire country thanks to a long campaign of voter suppression. Instead of doubling down on this war on democracy, Texas must address the real crisis in our elections -- dismantling the web of laws that prevent Texans from voting that do nothing to make our elections more secure.
- **Make permanent Gov. Abbott's Covid orders that expanded voting access in 2020:** To make voting easier during the pandemic, Gov. Abbott ordered an extra week of early voting and allowed voters to drop off their mail ballots in person before Election Day. These measures were very popular and should become a permanent part of Texas elections.
- **Allow voters to check on the status of their mail ballot over the Internet:** Texas is one of only a few states where you cannot check online to see where your mail ballot is in the process. Online tracking allows voters to identify and quickly remedy issues affecting their mail ballot, and gives people peace of mind that their mail ballot has been cast and counted.
- **Give voters the opportunity to correct problems with their mail ballot before they're rejected:** Currently, if election officials discover a problem with a voter's mail ballot, they reject the ballot before informing the voter. It would only be fair to require election officials to first inform the voter of the problem with their mail ballot within 24 hours, and offer them the opportunity to correct the issue before canceling it. If the voter is unable to fix the problem with their mail ballot, their right to vote in person should be explicitly guaranteed in the Texas Election Code.
- **Empower voters with disabilities and health and mobility issues to use curbside voting:** Texans can vote outside of polling places if their physical condition prevents them from going inside safely. But many voters don't know they're eligible for this option because not every polling place has signs out front telling voters about it. To make sure that every voter who is eligible to vote curbside can do so, polling places should be required to post prominent signs out front telling voters how to request it.
- **Allow Texans to register to vote when they renew their driver's licenses or change their address online:** Under the federal "motor voter" law, Texans can register to vote when they conduct driver's license transactions, and when they interact with an agency offering public assistance or

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services to people with disabilities. Texas should update its laws for the 21st Century to offer voter registration when such transactions occur online.

- **Make it easier for Texans to vote when they're sick:** When a voter gets sick just before an election, they have to go through a burdensome process to get a mail ballot that requires a doctor to fill out a form about their illness. Instead of weighing down sick Texans with unnecessary red tape to vote, voters should be able to get a ballot if they affirm under penalty of law that they are sick and eligible.
- **Simplify the process for cancelling a mail ballot:** Voters who need to cancel their mail ballot and then vote in person have to navigate a byzantine process that varies wildly for no good reason based on when in the election process they make their request. Texans should be able to easily cancel their ballot for any reason at any time, including at the polls when they don't have their mail ballot on them.
- **Fix a glitch preventing some voters who register on the voter registration deadline from voting:** The deadline to register to vote is often 29 days before the election, but another section of the Election Code states that voter registrations only take effect after 30 days, trapping some voters in limbo when they vote on Election Day. Texas should resolve this issue by making it explicit that voters who register on the deadline can vote during early vote and on Election Day.

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