



## *House of Representatives*

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STANDING COMMITTEES:

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### **Prepared Remarks for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on April 20, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and distinguished members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for inviting me to testify before today's committee hearing. I come before you today as a proud Georgian and a proud member of the Georgia General Assembly, where I serve as Speaker Pro Tempore of the Georgia House of Representatives. You, too, can be proud of the Peach State and the forward-looking approach we have taken to the elections process in order to ensure voter accessibility, transparency, and integrity.

In Georgia, we are making it easier to vote and harder to cheat. In 2020, Georgia implemented a new statewide elections system, and in 2021, we held both primary and general elections during the first modern worldwide pandemic, both with record turnout numbers. All these together, along with changes in voter preferences and choices, stressed our elections system. As a state legislature, our task was to initiate a comprehensive review to assure our state's citizens have the ability to vote in a timely manner and with confidence in their system. This four-month review culminated in SB 202, the Georgia Election Integrity Act of 2021.

But strengthening Georgia's elections processes is not new to 2021. In fact, from 2003 to 2020, 59 elections-related bills were signed into law in Georgia, including at least one bill every single year. Still, SB 202 is a bold, forward-facing approach to elections, implementing new

measures to increase voter accessibility and fairness. So, let me break down some of the key components of SB 202 and what it does for the State of Georgia.

For the first time, elections superintendents shall continue processing, counting and tabulating ballots until such activities are completed on Election Day to prevent the untimely release of returns. It establishes new guidelines for the public tabulation of ballots by type and authorizes the Secretary of State to maintain accurate voter rolls to ensure that absentee voting is legitimate. It requires transparency in any emergency voting measures that are adopted and makes it clear that the business of elections is to be run and funded by the government, not tech billionaires and their partisan allies.

For the first time, Georgia law now requires two Saturdays, instead of one, **and** two optional Sundays of early voting. SB 202 creates more uniformity of days and hours of early voting in all 159 Georgia counties. Now, 134 of Georgia's 159 counties will offer more in-person voting hours than ever before. I would note Georgia's total amount of 17 to 19 days of early voting is more than Delaware, the District of Columbia, New Mexico, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

For the first time, start and end dates for absentee ballot applications will more logically coincide with in-person early voting and practices in other states. This change will increase the likelihood that a voter successfully casts an absentee ballot and decreases the likelihood a voter forgets he or she ordered an absentee ballot as far as 6 months out, potentially slowing down in-person voting to go through the absentee ballot request cancellation process.

Certainly, though, SB 202 does not prohibit poll workers from giving water to people in line. In fact, it does the opposite: SB 202 prohibits offering anything of value within 150 feet of a polling place, *except for water offered by election officials*. This is because in 2018 and 2020,

activists and candidates passed out water, food, and gift cards, some with logos affixed to them, at polling locations while voters stood in line. A number of candidates appearing on the ballot even did the same. It's a practice referred to as "line-warming," and while not technically illegal it surely violates the spirit of free elections. The fact is that most states have a prohibition of activities considered to be campaigning or electioneering within a protected space. The protected distance by state ranges from 30 feet in Virginia and 100 feet in California to 150 feet in Massachusetts and 300 feet in Oklahoma.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't note the entirely selective outrage I have seen over the last few weeks. As Georgia makes our no-excuse absentee voting more secure, states like Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York—among others—simply don't have **any** no-excuse absentee voting. We also eliminated subjective signature matching for absentee ballots and ballot applications, but California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Vermont all have some form of absentee ballot matching—either against signatures or registration records. Instead, voters in Georgia may provide their driver's license number, last four digits of social security number and birth date or utilize a free state-issued voter ID card. All three are *objective* forms of identification. Let me be clear: Georgia did not eliminate no-excuse absentee voting. We also retained in law, and systematized, ballot drop boxes, a creative voting method invented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is easy to write alarming words and misleading sound bites that would lead people away from the facts, because the facts simply don't support what many are hearing or seeing, and it is just plain wrong. Members of the Committee, I look forward to setting the record straight, answering your questions and sharing more about how Georgia is at the forefront of elections

reform, as well as all the ways we are making it easier to vote, harder to cheat, and ensure every vote will count.