

November 7, 2023

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund (SPLC Action Fund), we write to strongly urge you to vote against the FY2024 Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) appropriations bill (H.R. 4664) being considered in the House this week. In addition to several other harmful provisions, this bill would threaten both equitable voter access and strong election administration. Both are critical ingredients in a healthy democracy, and they are under significant threat in the Deep South and across the country. Especially heading into a Presidential election year, it is imperative that all voters are able to exercise their fundamental right to vote, and that state and local election administrators have the resources they need to conduct safe, secure, accessible elections. Congress should be taking steps to secure those basic tenants of a functioning democracy, not passing bills like this that undermine them.

H.R. 4664 would endanger voter access by prohibiting the use of funds appropriated under the bill “or any other Act ... to implement, administer, or otherwise carry out” most of Executive Order 14019 on Promoting Access to Voting (Voting Access EO). The Voting Access EO is a critical effort on the part of the federal government to ensure that eligible Americans—including people of color, people with disabilities, justice-impacted people, active-duty military and overseas voters, Native Americans, and others—have a nonpartisan opportunity to register to vote and to receive information about voting during interactions with federal agencies. The Voting Access EO is rooted in the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993, in which Congress found that it is the duty of Federal, State, and local governments to promote the exercise of the fundamental right to vote. Many of the voter registration and information opportunities it encourages are modeled after the highly successful voter registration operations at state agencies like DMVs, Medicaid offices, offices serving people with disabilities, and military recruitment offices. Federal agencies have worked diligently to meet the charge of this important executive order.¹ Prohibiting the use of funds for continued work on it would threaten the gains in voter access the EO has affected and contribute to the alarming trend in states across the country of rolling back access to voting and stymying progress toward a multiracial, inclusive democracy.

H.R. 4664 also severely threatens election administration by zeroing out funding for election security grants—the primary source of federal funding to the states and localities that run our elections—at a time of heightened need. Cutting this critical federal support for the state and local election administrators who are the lifeblood of our elections is a terrible idea any year, but especially heading into a Presidential election year, doing so would be setting our democracy up to fail. The 2024 elections will be the first presidential election since the passage of a slew of new laws in the wake of the 2020 elections that

¹ White House Fact Sheets: September 2021 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/28/fact-sheet-biden-administration-promotes-voter-participation-with-new-agency-steps/>, December 2021 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/08/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-administration-is-taking-action-to-restore-and-strengthen-american-democracy/>, March 2022 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/24/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-releases-report-on-native-american-voting-rights/>, March 2023 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/05/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-administration-continues-to-promote-access-to-voting/>.

severely complicate election administration and, in turn, hinder full participation in our democracy.² For example, a recent Georgia law shortened the period before an election that workers have to receive, process, and mail out absentee ballots and opened the floodgates to frivolous mass challenges to registered voters that election workers must spend time addressing when they should be focused on running the election.³ A recent Florida law mandated unnecessary and impractical staffing requirements for drop boxes and created room for disruptive behavior from election observers.⁴ New laws across the Deep South prevent election workers from accessing private funding to fill the tremendous gaps they face.⁵ These laws and others like them have made it harder for local election authorities to conduct safe, secure, and accessible elections. And they do so at a time of historic turnover among election administrators; the last few years have seen significant loss of expertise among professionals running our elections, and new officials stepping into these roles face steep learning curves with very few resources.⁶ Further, the issues created over the last few years compound with the fact that election infrastructure across the country was already aging and in desperate need of repair and investment to protect against future threats – both of which require significant funding.⁷ Given this environment, rather than zeroing out funding for state and local election administration, Congress should be funding it generously.

This bill represents a cynical effort to take our country backward, to a time when our democracy was less inclusive and less representative. We urge you to vehemently oppose H.R. 4664 and similar measures in future appropriations bills you consider. For more information on either of these issues, please contact Laura Williamson, Senior Policy Advisor for Voting Rights, at laura.williamson@splcenter.org.

Sincerely,



Sakira Cook, Federal Policy Director
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund



Laura Williamson, Senior Policy Advisor for
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² A Decade Long Erosion: The Impact of the Shelby County Decision on the Political Participation and Representation of Black People and Other People of Color in the Deep South, Southern Poverty Law Center, 2023, <https://www.splcenter.org/shelby-county-decision-report>.

³ Georgia Senate Bill 202, effective March 25, 2023, <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/59827>.

⁴ Florida Senate Bill 90, effective XX, <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2021/90>.

⁵ Ala. Code 1975 § 17-9-52; Fla. Stat. § 97.0291; Ga. Code Ann., § 21-2-71, § 21-2-212; Miss. Code Ann. § 23-15-273; Louisiana recently banned private funding for elections via ballot initiative; voters passed amendment 1 on October 17, 2023,

https://house.louisiana.gov/Agendas_2023/2023%20Constitutional%20Amendment%20Summaries.pdf.

⁶ “Poll of Election Officials Shows High Turnover Amid Safety Threats and Political Interference,” Brennan Center for Justice, April 25, 2023, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/poll-election-officials-shows-high-turnover-amid-safety-threats-and>.

⁷ “50 States of Need,” Election Infrastructure Initiative,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6083502fc0f6531f14d6e929/t/61f836e405feca3722d63b9d/1643656990641/50-States-Of-Need.pdf>.