File #: 200640, **Version:** 0

Calling on the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate to hold hearings on voter suppression and voter intimidation during the 2020 United States presidential election.

WHEREAS, According to the Center for Public Integrity, barriers to voting that disproportionately impact Black, Latino, and Native American communities are not exclusive to the southern states formerly subject to federal oversight under the Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, Every state in the United States of America has laws or practices in place preventing equal access to and representation at the election polls, including the disenfranchisement of people who have been formerly incarcerated, strict voter ID laws, restrictions on absentee and mail-in balloting, and shutting down polling places in predominantly Black and Brown communities; and

WHEREAS, Thirty states currently use signature matching as a voter fraud-prevention measure, which disqualified hundreds of thousands of ballots during the 2016 presidential election. Ballot rejections disproportionately affect certain demographic groups, including elderly voters, young voters, and voters of color. In some states like Ohio, voters can correct these errors before Election Day. In other states like Texas, local officials have no obligations to notify voters if their ballot was rejected; and

WHEREAS, In Arizona and other states, it is illegal for people to deliver someone else's filled-out ballet to a polling station. In Tennessee, protestors camping on state property can be convicted of a felony and lose their right to vote. In Connecticut, early voting and no-excuse absentee balloting are not allowed, and absentee ballots arriving after Election Day are not counted. In Rhode Island, there is a requirement that photo IDs must not have expired within six months of voting, despite the fact that the state's Department of Motor Vehicles has mostly been shut down since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, On November 1, 2020, the Texas Supreme Court rejected a request by Republican activists and candidates to throw out nearly 127,000 early balloting votes from drive-thru polling sites in the state's most populous and largely Democratic county; and

WHEREAS, Federal and state level requests for funding during the COVID-19 pandemic that would help local officials overcome a shortage of poll workers, expand polling places to accommodate proper social distancing, and purchase personal protective equipment were rejected; and

WHEREAS, There have been many cases across the country of voter intimidation during the 2020 presidential election. In recent months, Trump campaign advertisements have called for individuals to "enlist" in the "Army for Trump's election security operation," a tactic being used to register poll watchers. Election officials, social-media platforms, and law enforcement have expressed concerns that the Trump campaign's use of militarized language may inspire voter intimidation. In Philadelphia, members of the Trump campaign have been videotaping voters while they deposit their ballots in ballot drop boxes, which Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro stated could be considered illegal voter intimidation. Leaders at voting rights organizations are mobilizing volunteers to monitor polling places and report voter intimidation; and

WHEREAS, During the final day of early voting in North Carolina, City of Graham police pepper sprayed and arrested some participants of the "I Am Change March to the Polls" event, including young children and the elderly. The peaceful march was organized by a minister of a local church. In Texas, a group of Trump supporters driving trucks and waving Trump flags surrounded and slowed a Biden-Harris campaign bus, leading to a cancellation of two planned rallies. A motorcade of Trump supporters halted traffic on the Garden State Parkway in New Jersey. In Georgia, a rally for Democrats was cancelled due to fears of "a large militia presence" drawn by President Trump's event nearby. In Florida, dozens of counties called an election protection hotline reporting individuals and groups harassing voters at the polls; and

WHEREAS, In New Jersey, a Joe Biden supporter found a flier on the windshield of his car that included a firing-range outline of a human body riddled with bullet holes. On the back of the flier, someone had printed in all capital letters, "I AM A VET FOR TRUMP.'' In Michigan, election disinformation tactics were reported on social media that mislead voters, including fake accounts telling voters the wrong date of the election. Two men were also charged with several felonies related to voter intimidation and election fraud after orchestrating a series of inaccurate robocalls to Michigan voters, telling them that law enforcement and debt collectors would use the information provided by those who cast an absentee ballot. In Boston and Los Angeles, there have been reports of official ballot boxes being set on fire. In a separate occasion, emails were sent to people in Pennsylvania and Ohio threatening they would be attacked if they went to the polls; and

WHEREAS, It is a Constitutional right to vote and the United States Congress must protect that right. While the House Committee on Oversight and Reform and the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties have recently held a series of hearings investigating voting rights and voter suppression, there continue to be policies and practices in place supporting voter suppression and intimidation across the country; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby call on the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate to hold hearings on voter suppression and voter intimidation during the 2020 United States presidential election.

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