

Democracy North Carolina

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Confusion Over ID Rules, New Districts & Possible Challenges Fuels Need for “Election Protection” Hotline and Special Website

As North Carolina begins its early voting period today, Election Protection, the nation’s largest nonpartisan voter protection coalition, has launched a toll-free hotline to help voters address problems and answer questions: **866-OUR-VOTE**.

The Election Protection initiative, which is headquartered at the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Washington, DC, aims to provide voters with the information they need to make their voices heard as well as ensure that their voting rights are protected.

North Carolina voters face additional challenges in 2012, according to Bob Hall of Democracy North Carolina, a nonpartisan organization that is helping operate the hotline’s call center throughout the early voting period. The Law School at the University of North Carolina will be staffing the call center on Election Day.

“The new district lines mean many voters will see strange names on their ballot,” Hall said. “They may even get a different ballot from a neighbor down the street because of how the new district lines zigzag through neighborhoods. About two million voters live in precincts divided by district lines and you’re 50 percent more likely to live in one of those split precincts if you’re black.”

“In addition, we’re concerned about vigilante activists possibly disrupting the election by challenging voters,” he said. “Tea party-inspired groups like the Voter Integrity Project have already challenged voters and they’ve been recruiting volunteers for an unknown range of activities.”

Hall noted that a report released on Saturday by the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights indicates about 300 volunteers across North Carolina are affiliated with a Texas-based group called True the Vote which aggressively challenges voters, often on dubious grounds.

“People should not be intimidated. We have the same rights and procedures that we had in 2008. Even the voter ID rules are the same; in general, you don’t need to present a photo ID when you go vote,” he said. The bill to require registered voters to show a photo ID before voting was vetoed.

Democracy NC has distributed 300,000 wallet cards across the state with “20 Tips for Voting.” See: <http://democracy-nc.org/downloads/WalletCard.pdf>

Nonpartisan groups have also created a special website that answers questions about where, when and how to vote – www.NCElectionConnection.com. Voters can preview their own ballot, find the nearest Early Voting site, and check their registration status through links at the website.

Election Protection’s trained volunteers will assist voters over the phone with any question or problem they need answered. Voters may call 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683) toll-free anytime. The hotline will be staffed live from 8:30 am to 5 pm during the early voting (October 18 through November 3) and from 6:30 am to 7:30 pm on Election Day.

Spanish-speaking voters can receive assistance from 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (1-888-839-8682).