

# American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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## **AFL-CIO “My Vote, My Right” Program Tackling Voting Rights Abuses**

*Nonpartisan coalition efforts focused on public education, election administration advocacy, polling place support, and legal advice in nine target states*

**October 16, Washington, D.C.** – In anticipation of record turnout at the polls this Election Day, the AFL-CIO is working in nine states – **Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Virginia, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Colorado and Nevada** – to educate citizens about their voting rights and help prevent voting rights violations. Members of AFL-CIO unions and labor groups are participating in the AFL-CIO’s “My Vote, My Right” program in coalition with civil rights organizations, faith groups, local lawyers, and other community allies.

“It’s time to turn around America, and we will start by protecting our right to vote and making sure that every single vote is counted,” said AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker. “A truly historic election day is going to come down to individual voters who should do everything we can to protect our own right to vote—and those of our friends and neighbors.”

The AFL-CIO-led voter protection coalition’s efforts are centered on three main components: a public education program informing voters about their voting rights, meetings with local election officials and Secretary of States about election administration plans, and recruitment and training of volunteer poll monitors and poll workers. The group plans to address voting rights issues in 27 communities, including **Cleveland, Columbus, and Toledo**, Ohio, **Detroit and Flint**, Michigan, **St. Louis and Kansas City**, Missouri, **Philadelphia and Pittsburgh**, Pennsylvania, **Milwaukee**, Wisconsin, **Denver**, Colorado, **Albuquerque**, New Mexico, and **Richmond** and the **Tidewater area** of Virginia.

The AFL-CIO points to numerous studies indicating that voting rights will be at risk this year. A study of the 2008 presidential primaries conducted by the Pew Center on the States found that polls in parts of **California, Ohio, and the District of Columbia** ran out of paper ballots as early as noon because of unusually high voter turnout. A study by Common Cause and the Century Foundation examining progress in voter issues since 2006 in ten key states concluded that “several [states] still have a number of structural and statutory weaknesses that put voting rights at risk once again this year.”

Examples of the AFL-CIO and its affiliate union’s voter education work include:

- A “Voter Bill of Rights” flier describing state and federal voting rights laws, which by Election Day will be distributed to more than 600,000 voters nationwide, including more than 100,000 flyers each in **Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Missouri**;

- Volunteers in **Michigan** and **Pittsburgh**, Pennsylvania are knocking on doors in key precincts to educate thousands of voters about their rights;
- In **Detroit**, members of AFL-CIO affiliated unions the Amalgamated Transit Union and the United Steelworkers are passing out bookmarks with voting rights information to bus riders.
- The AFL-CIO partnered with ‘Rock the Vote’ to distribute 10,000 “Student Voter Bill of Rights” fliers at concerts held to register student voters at five **Ohio** college campuses in Sept.;
- The American Federation of Government Employees, an AFL-CIO affiliate union, is operating two web pages on popular social networking sites — MySpace and Facebook — providing students with “student voting tips,” links to resources such as the state board of elections websites, and information for students in the major swing states;
- AFL-CIO voter protection activists are referring voters to the toll-free voting rights hotline operated by the Election Protection coalition, 1-866-OUR-VOTE, to check their registration and report problems.

The AFL-CIO voter protection program is also recruiting and training union volunteers to serve as nonpartisan poll workers and poll monitors on Election Day, helping to address voting problems including long lines, misuse of provisional ballots, and demands for voter IDs which are not mandated by law. The volunteers will be thoroughly trained on federal, state and local election laws. On Election Day, poll monitors will be deployed outside of polling places where they will be available to answer voters’ questions about their rights and help resolve any problems voters may encounter.

Hundreds of AFL-CIO union members and retirees have been recruited to work as poll workers in **Franklin County, Ohio, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and St. Louis**. In **Kansas City**, Missouri, the AFL-CIO has and its coalition partners have initiated a program to recruit public high school students to monitor polling places near their school.

Finally, AFL-CIO and its coalition partners are coordinating with local election officials on their election administration plans. For example:

- In **Pueblo, Colorado**, the voter protection coalition met with county election officials to work on strategies to reduce the lines at the polls and convinced them to send out an absentee ballot application to every registered voter in the county;
- In **Pennsylvania**, the voting rights coalition has been advocating the Secretary of State for a policy that would ensure each polling place has sufficient emergency paper ballots on hand Election Day and would require paper ballots if more than 50 percent of the voting machines break down.

The AFL-CIO Lawyers Coordinating Committee (LCC) attorneys have also been active in the nine target states:

- In response to the widely-reported plan by **Macomb County, Michigan** Republican party officials to challenge the right to vote of homeowners who recently had their homes foreclosed, LCC attorney Mary Ellen Gurewitz assisted in the filing of a lawsuit to challenge the legality of this ‘caging’ operation, which would have disproportionately effected African American voters in the state;
- In **New Mexico**, the local voting rights coalition worked with an LCC attorney to convince the Secretary of State to adopt a poster in polling places across the state listing the types of IDs mandated by law;
- LCC lawyers in **Wisconsin** filed a motion on behalf of Milwaukee Branch of NAACP and Milwaukee Teachers Education Association against the Attorney General’s decision to purge voters from the rolls if their driver’s license records didn’t match their voter records.