



TESTIMONY

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2023

HOUSE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

I am testifying as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas **IN OPPOSITION** to House Bill 1243. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. Thank you for allowing us to share the League of Women Voters of Texas position on this bill.

The League opposes increasing the penalty for illegal voting to a second degree felony. We feel that this level of punishment is too extreme.

We also believe that increasing the penalty is not warranted at this time. There is no evidence that widespread voter fraud currently exists in Texas. There has not been an uptick in the number of convictions for illegal voting since the penalty was lowered to a class A misdemeanor in the fall of 2021 as part of Senate Bill 1. That bill passed out of the house by a vote of 80-35, and after review by a conference committee, all Republicans in the Senate voted for it. In fact, House Speaker Dade Phelan told the Houston Chronicle that this amendment was part of the Legislature's "holistic approach to advancing election integrity" that struck "the appropriate balance between ballot access and accountability."¹

While the League does not condone ineligible voting, a 20 year prison sentence is excessive and is more likely to intimidate eligible voters. A class misdemeanor carries a possible sentence of 12 months in jail which is sufficient to deter ineligible voters from casting a ballot. Furthermore, a recent review by The New York Times of some 400 voting-fraud charges filed nationwide since 2017 found that actual prosecutions of illegal voting are blue-moon events, and often netted people who didn't realize they were breaking the law.²

Finally, the state has a backlog of 15,000 people who are waiting to receive their paperwork releasing them from parole. HB 1243 would unfairly target these individuals.

Therefore, we urge the committee to oppose HB 1243.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

For additional information, please contact: Stephanie Swanson, House Elections Committee Issue Chair,
sswanson@lwvtexas.org

¹ See Taylor Goldstein, Texas Republicans Quietly Reduced Penalties for Honest Voting Mistakes. HOUSTON CHRONICLE, Sep. 10, 2021, (<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/Voters-who-make-mistakes-get-a-break-with-new-16450334.php>).

² See Michael Wines, In Voter Fraud, Penalties Often Depend on Who's Voting, The New York Times, Sep. 7, 2022, (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/07/us/voter-fraud-penalties.html>).

The League of Women Voters is one of America's oldest and most trusted civic nonprofit organizations. Formed in 1919, the League of Women Voters of Texas represents over 13,000 grassroots advocates and 34 local Leagues across the State of Texas. The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government and seek to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to people 16 and older of all gender identities.