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Repeal of law is a victory for voters

Organizations may register voters without fear of penalties

NASHVILLE—Late last week, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed election law changes passed by lawmakers before they recessed. The new law eliminates stringent regulations and criminal penalties on voter registration drives.

Marian Ott, President of the League of Women Voters of Tennessee, says, "This law is a victory for Tennessee voters and those organizations who register them. We look forward to continuing that work and collaborating with state and local election officials to address the unique challenges that will likely affect the 2020 election cycle."

Groups challenged constitutionality

The law passed in 2019 was in response to a surge in registrations during the 2018 midterm election. However, instead of providing greater resources to help election offices process the influx, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a measure that created criminal and civil penalties against those who fail to comply with onerous requirements which included fines for "incomplete" voter registration applications.

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee is the lead plaintiff in a federal lawsuit challenging the previously enacted law. Last fall, a federal court blocked the law from taking effect as the case was being litigated, enabling community voter registration groups to continue their efforts.

The American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Tennessee, Campaign Legal Center, and Fair Elections Center represents the League and other partners in this case. The law firm of Sherrard, Roe, Voigt, Harbison is co-counsel on the case.

League now poised to address low voter registration, turnout

Moving forward to the 2020 election, the League is focusing on increasing both voter registration and participation. “Tennessee ranks 44th in voter registration and 49th in participation,” says Ott. “We look forward to working with our partners to raise both those statistics this year.”

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to men and women of all ages. With over 750 affiliates across the county, the League is one of the nation’s most trusted organizations.