

**From:** Ertel, Mike  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 11, 2012 4:24 PM  
**To:** 'simmons.david@flsenate.gov'; 'jason.brodeur@myfloridahouse.gov'; 'mike.clelland@myfloridahouse.gov'; 'karen.castordentel@myfloridahouse.gov'  
**Cc:** 'mike@michaelertel.com'  
**Subject:** Suggested Election Law improvements

Senator Simmons, Representatives:

I look forward to seeing each of you next week at the legislative delegation meeting. I have asked to be able to present my suggested improvements to Florida's Election Law.

Before you read on, please remember that more people voted in last month's election than had ever voted in any election in the state's history. For a great majority of Floridians, the 2012 election was a positive experience. However, we must continue to improve on the process to make it the most secure, open, transparent and inclusive elections system in the nation.

But, the process does need some improvements. Before we discuss them, please realize that interest groups on both sides of the political spectrum see a profit – either pecuniarily, politically, or publicly – from pointing out what they perceive are flaws. In a perfect world, we could declare an “Election Law Détente,” followed by a rational discussion of areas that can be improved upon, and implementation that is fair for all Floridians, while ensuring security and opportunity. I look forward to being a part of that discussion, and thank you for allowing me to present what I believe are concrete improvements to the process for our voters.

My suggested improvements are:

### **Voter Registration:**

--Outlaw commission-based registration, or pay-per-registration/information schemes. All paid registrars must be paid at least minimum wage. *(Doing this will disincentivize policies which damage voter confidence in the process.)*

--Stay with 10-day application return rule, but make the registered agents and officers of each Third-Party Voter Registration Organization personally liable for all violations. Maintain current fines for violations. *(Doing this will disincentivize policies which damage voter confidence in the process.)*

--Codify in state law that high school principals are able to accept completed registration forms from their students at the school. *(Currently, Seminole County adheres to the law by making high school principals “Deputy Supervisors of Elections.” However, in other counties high school principals are required to complete the same registration paperwork political operatives and campaigns complete.)*

--Have all registration forms entered into the Florida Voter Registration System by local elections offices. Forms submitted to Division of Elections should be immediately (within 48 hours) mailed to local the Supervisor of Elections. *(This will increase efficiency by eliminating duplication of efforts.)*

### **Write-in candidates:**

--Any write-in candidate shall be on the primary ballot of the political party of which they are a member. Write-in candidates must follow the same party registration rules as non-write-in candidates. *(This eliminates a loophole that could be used to close primary elections – thus diminishing voters' confidence in the process.)*

## **Form of ballot:**

--Standardize all amendments to the same 15/75 word limits. Also, eliminate the requirement that voting systems permit strike-through and underlined text. *(Will drastically decrease lines at the polls and save counties hundreds of thousands of dollars in printing costs each election.)*

## **Absentee Voting:**

--Allow voters who remembered they did not sign their absentee ballot to file an affidavit at the elections office before the canvass of the absentees to allow their ballot to count. *(Making this change will reduce the potential of fraudulent theft and return of absentee ballots, causing a voter to lose their right to cast a ballot.)*

--Standardize in-office absentee process to occur only during regular office hours, and not at all during early voting at elections offices being used as early voting locations, or on Election Day, or the day before Election Day. *(Currently Florida Law does not prohibit a person from skipping in front of the early voting line and instead requesting an absentee ballot on-site. This change will ensure statewide uniformity of processes.)*

## **Early Voting:**

--Local control over locations as long as all sites are housed in government-managed facilities, and none of the county commission districts have one more/fewer sites than any other commission district. *(This will ensure voters have ample parking and room for early voting, as well as provide elections offices with more flexibility in locations.)*

--Stay with the same eight days, the same local flexibility on hours. However, all locations in each county must be open for the same number of hours and same number of days. *(Voters need to have some sense of comfort that there is continuity on the hours and days each site will be open.)*

## **Provisional Ballots:**

--Rename "Eligibility Verification Ballots." *(Better aligns the name of the ballot with its purpose.)*

--Eliminate the need for EVBs for county-to-county changes within Florida. However, dramatically increase the penalties for illegal voting. *(By returning to the previous standards, voting will speed up for everyone at the polling site. By increasing the penalties for violating the law and actually prosecuting violators, fewer people will attempt to fraudulently vote more than once.)*

## **Pollwatchers/Electioneering:**

--Strengthen penalties for pollwatchers who violate Florida Election Law. Make all violations a felony. *(Pollwatchers should better understand that Florida has a zero-tolerance policy on violations of election laws in the precinct.)*

--Codify that the no-solicitation zone includes any voter in line. *(Allows voters to wait for their turn without having to be harassed, intimidated or forced to discuss their choices with campaign workers.)*

--Codify in Florida law that email addresses used for voter registration and voting purposes are exempt from public records. *(The secrecy of our military members' email addresses is currently only protected by a Division of Elections opinion, and needs to be codified within the law.)*

## **Equipment:**

--Eliminate the unnecessary required repurchase of all-new touchscreen voting machines for all 67 counties. *(Eliminating this provision from 101.56075(3) will save counties millions of dollars in a non-essential purchase.)*

Michael Ertel  
Seminole County Supervisor of Elections  
[www.VoteSeminole.org](http://www.VoteSeminole.org)  
Voter Hotline: 407.585.VOTE  
Direct Line: 407.708.7712  
Cell Phone: 407.687.3654  
Home Phone: 407.365.0755

Like us at Facebook.com/VoteSeminole  
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*These men ask for just the same thing, fairness, and fairness only.  
This, so far as in my power, they, and all others, shall have. -- Abraham Lincoln*



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