



**Testimony in Support of S.15, and
Against Measures that Disenfranchise Voters**

NAACP VT Presidents Mia Schultz and Steffen Gillom

April 30th, 2021

Please accept the following information from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People of Vermont (NAACP VT). For years, the NAACP VT has worked in various forms of voter education and voter mobilization.

The NAACP of Vermont stands in strong support of S.15, to make permanent the policy of mailing all active, registered voters a ballot in Vermont's general elections. This state, and nation, have a long history when it comes to the disenfranchisement of voting for colored people. While there is still much work to be done around election equity, the passage of S.15 lowers voting barriers and makes our democratic process more accessible for all people.

The NAACP is very concerned to hear calls to include additional security measures such as signature verification. These suggested additional security measures, based almost entirely on unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud, are not only unnecessary and burdensome, but also come at a time when across the nation, the right to vote is under attack.¹

Furthermore, research consistently shows the use of security measures, such as signature matching, particularly when used with a mailed-ballot system, leads to disproportionate disenfranchisement of minority voters, particularly voters of color.

In a study from Florida, younger, first-time, and racial and ethnic minority voters who cast VBM ballots were all **at least twice as likely as older and white voters to have their vote by mail ballot rejected** in the 2018 general election. On top of that, despite changes in the ability of voters to 'cure' their rejected vote by mail ballots, the likelihood of BIPOC and younger voters

¹ (In just the first three months of 2021, more than 361 voter suppression bills have been introduced in at least 47 states). <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-march-2021>

casting a mail ballot that was rejected increased in 2018 compared to 2016, while the rejection rate of VBM ballots cast by white voters decrease from 2016.²

Florida is not alone, a Georgia study found similar findings. The study found that underrepresented groups including young, female, minority, and newly registered voters have a higher rate of rejected vote by mail ballots (ranging 4 to 7% more likely to be rejected)—both those received on time and those late—compared to their counterparts.³

It is important to emphasize that differences in the likelihood of VBM ballots being rejected are not necessarily evidence of explicit voter discrimination against these groups of voters by election officials. Empirically, the Georgia study was not able to directly observe the determinants of VBM ballot rejections across Georgia's 159 counties to determine the specific reasons why these groups of voters are more likely to have their ballots rejected by local election authorities. But that's also not to say it doesn't exist. **The statistics alone, regardless of the reason, show that VBM with signature verification has been found to disproportionately disenfranchise communities of color.**

Countless states across the country are actively putting up barrier to voting, many of which are barriers are targeted at silencing voices of color in particular. Whether the policies are overt or covert, the NCAAP is extremely troubled to hear these calls. Vermont has the opportunity to become one of the most voter-friendly states in the nation, and the NAACP stands in strong support of S.15, and against measures that disenfranchise voters.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mia Schultz
President
NAACP Rutland

Steffen Gillom
President
NAACP Windham

¹ According to the Brennan Center of Justice, as of March 24, legislators have introduced 361 bills with restrictive voting provisions in 47 states. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-march-2021>

² Smith A., Daniel and Anna Baringer. 2020. "ACLU Florida: Report on Vote-by-Mail ballots in the 2018 General Election." *University of Florida*.

https://www.acluf.org/sites/default/files/aclu_florida_-_report_on_vote-by-mail_ballots_in_the_2018.pdf

³ Shino, Enrijeta, Mara Suttman-Lea, and Daniel A. Smith. 2020. "Voting by Mail in a VEMO World: Assessing Rejected Absentee Ballots in Georgia." *University of Florida*.

https://electionscience.clas.ufl.edu/files/2020/05/GA_Venmo.pdf