



Statement on Voter Purge in Texas, Louisiana & Oklahoma

“The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy.”
John Lewis, 2019



September 30th, 2024

**OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SWBLSA
RE: INACTIVE VOTERS LIST AND VOTER PURGING LAWS IN OUR REGION**

The Southwest Region of the National Black Law Student Association (SWBLSA) is dedicated to promoting the educational, professional, and social needs of Black law students. SWBLSA stands in firm opposition to the voter purging and inactive voter laws currently exercised by the Secretaries of State in Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma. These laws unfairly target voters who have exercised their discretion to vote or not vote in recent elections by placing them on inactive voter lists and subsequently removing them from voter rolls. This practice represents a modern form of voter suppression and disproportionately impacts Black communities and other marginalized groups, directly infringing upon their right to vote.

Voter suppression has deep roots in American history, particularly when it comes to Black Americans¹. It is essential to remember that Black people in the United States have fought both long and hard for the right to vote. From the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870, to the courageous activism of leaders during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, including the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, generations of Black Americans have endured violence, intimidation, and systemic discrimination to secure access to the ballot box. They fought the good fight. Today, voter purging laws undermine this legacy of resistance and resilience.

In Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma, these purging policies act as barriers to participation in the democratic process².

¹ Jim Crow Laws and Black Voting Rights, History (Feb. 28, 2021), <https://www.history.com/news/jim-crow-laws-black-vote>.

² Inactive Voters, La. Sec'y of State, <https://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/Pages/InactiveVoters.aspx>.; Suspense List Mass Cancellation Process, Tex. Sec'y of State, <https://webservices.sos.state.tx.us/document-share/files/Suspense%20List%20Mass%20Cancellation%20Process.pdf>; Okla. Stat. tit. 26, § 4-120.2v2.

Louisiana places voters on the inactive list if they fail to confirm their address, and after two federal general elections, their registration is canceled³. Similarly in Texas, voters are placed on a suspense list if county election officials believe the voter no longer resides at the address listed on their registration.⁴ In all three states, if voters fail to respond to an address verification notice, they are added to the suspense list or (inactive list in Louisiana), where they remain for two federal election cycles, or approximately four years. While a voter on the suspense list (inactive list) can still vote, they must sign a statement of residence at the polls.⁵ If two federal elections (four years) pass and a voter does not respond to the address confirmation or vote, then these voters are purged from the voter registration list. Requiring re-registration creates unnecessary barriers to voting and disenfranchises those who may already face difficulties participating in elections.

This year alone, over 453,000 voter registrations were purged from Oklahoma's voter rolls, removing individuals who were deemed inactive, as well as deceased individuals and those who had moved out of state.⁶ While list maintenance is important, targeting those who fail to vote in a set period is an infringement on their right to choose when and how to vote. Requiring them to re-register to participate in future elections further disenfranchises those already at a disadvantage.

These laws undermine the ability of individuals to freely exercise their right to vote and enforce an undue punishment on those who may not vote in every election. Voting should not be a "use it or lose it" right. Our right to vote includes the freedom to decide when and how we participate. Removing voters from the rolls disproportionately affects communities of color, low-income voters, and unhoused populations, who may not receive address confirmation notices or have the time and resources to update their voter registration.⁷

Voter purging laws are discriminatory in both intent and effect. They penalize individuals for exercising their personal agency to abstain from voting in certain elections and disproportionately

³ La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 18:193.

⁴ Phil Prazan Check Texas' Suspended Voter List — What Next?, NBC DFW (Sept. 15, 2023), <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/politics/lone-star-politics/check-texas-suspended-voter-list-what-next/3647072/>.

⁵ [Tex. Elec. Code § 15.112](#)

⁶ Justin Rose, Nearly Half a Million Purged From Oklahoma's Voter Rolls Before Presidential Election, KSWO (Sept. 20, 2023), <https://www.kswow.com/2024/09/20/nearly-half-a-million-purged-oklahomas-voter-rolls-before-presidential-election>.

⁷ Phillip Jankowski, Use It or Lose It: Bill That Could Strip Inactive Texas Voters' Registration Advances, Dallas News (Apr. 17, 2023), <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2023/04/17/use-it-or-lose-it-bill-that-could-strip-inactive-texas-voters-registration-advances/>.

affect already marginalized groups. Several civil rights organizations and legal experts have echoed these concerns:

- **Brennan Center for Justice** points out that voter purges are often conducted in a way that disproportionately affects communities of color, undermining the democratic principle of fair representation.⁸
- **Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights** argues that purges target vulnerable voters who are more likely to move frequently, such as renters and young adults, making it harder for them to maintain an active voter registration status.⁹

SWBLSA calls upon lawmakers and election officials in Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma to put an end to these harmful voter purging policies. We demand legislative action that ensures all eligible voters remain on the voter rolls regardless of their voting frequency and encourages voter participation without penalizing those who may abstain from certain elections, because our democracy depends on it. We urge the legal community, civil rights organizations, and students to join us in advocating for reforms that protect the sanctity of the vote for all people. We must protect our rights in their entirety. Sitting idly is not an option.

SWBLSA remains committed to defending the rights of Black and minority communities in the face of policies that threaten to erode the progress we have made. We can not afford to move backwards. We urge you to contact your local representatives, engage with civic organizations, and spread awareness about the devastating impact of these laws.

Together, we will fight for a democracy that works for everyone.

In SWBLSA Service,

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⁸ Voter Purges, Brennan Ctr. for Just., <https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ensure-every-american-can-vote/vote-suppression/voter-purges>.

⁹ The Problem of Voter Purging and Where We Go From Here, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (2020), <https://civilrights.org/blog/the-problem-of-voter-purging-and-where-we-go-from-here/>.