

Testimony of Leon County, Florida,
Supervisor of Elections Ion Sancho

Presented on March 16, 2010 to
The United States House of Representatives,

The Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil
Rights and Civil Liberties,

Committee On The Judiciary

Honorable members of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, thank you for inviting me to present this testimony today. I have been the Supervisor of Elections for Leon County Florida for over twenty one years, and during that time the issue of felon disenfranchisement has been one of the most consistent and problematic issues plaguing Florida's electoral landscape.

Florida probably provides perhaps the most dramatic case for reform of all the states in our nation. It's has been estimated that as many as 5 million American citizens are barred from voting as a result of committing crimes, and of these persons, almost one in five are Floridians.

The genesis of our current statutes began following the American Civil War, with the Florida Constitution of 1868, when state officials officially began their formal efforts to frustrate Federal intervention into its segregated society, and unfortunately, it continues to mars our recent political history.

Who can forget the Florida election of 2000, perhaps the most infamous election in our country's history. While most Americans can recall problems with "butterfly ballots" or "pregnant chad", less well known, but of more significance, is the role played by flawed "felon lists", distributed to the 67 Florida supervisors' of elections in the spring of 2000 by state election officials. According to the data provided to the Florida supervisors of elections in 2002, pursuant to the consent decree entered into with the NAACP and then Florida Secretary of State Kathryn Harris, approximately 20,000 legal Florida voters were barred from casting ballots in that presidential election., a contest decided by a mere 537 votes.

In 2004, state election officials barred Florida's Supervisor of Elections' from using that iteration of the "felon lists" to remove ineligible voters, when the media disclosed that list contained severe inaccuracies.

Even as I'm talking to you now, Florida's current efforts to reform the process of civil rights restoration for voting is not working. Governor Charlie Crist and the Florida Cabinet, based upon the need for fundamental fairness in Florida's restoration of civil rights process, instituted reforms in 2007 allowing for the restoration of voting rights for all non-violent offenders. Failure by the Florida Legislature to fund the needed positions, 42 in the 2008 budget (instead of providing these workers - their existing staff was actually reduced), means that today there is as long as a three year wait in processing the paperwork of individuals who were pardoned in 2007, and an additional 20,000 were added to the waiting list this year alone.

It's time we adopted a rational and national standard for federal elections, and to end the confusing process has plagued election officials for decades, not just in Florida, but across the country.

In conclusion I must tell you that in my tenure as an election administrator in Florida, nothing has modernized our voting process more than the two major pieces of federal legislation, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and the Help American Vote Act of 2002 . We need the United States Congress to step up to the plate now, as it has previously done, and allow the reintegration of these citizens to our national electoral system in a fair and straightforward manner. That's why I support this legislation today.