

# TEXAS STATE HEARING

**Texas Southern University**  
**Houston, Texas**  
**April 5, 2014**

## GUEST COMMISSIONERS

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Deborah Chen, National Treasurer & Board Member, OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates	Howard Jefferson, National Board Member, NAACP, Political Action Director, NAACP Texas State Conference
Craig Jackson, Professor, Thurgood Marshall School of Law	J. Goodwille Pierre, Vice President, National Bar Association

## PANELISTS

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Ann Harris Bennett, Concerned Citizen	Kyle Longhofer, Fort Bend Democratic Party
Rogene Gee Calvert, Director, Texas Asian American Redistricting Initiative	Mario Salinas, Texas State Deputy Director, Mi Familia Vota
Robin Chandler, Policy Specialist, Disability Rights Texas	Christina Sanders, State Director, Texas League of Young Voters
Maureen Haver, Common Cause Texas	Carolyn Scantlebury, Former President, NAACP Houston Branch
George Korbell, Attorney, League of United Latin American Citizens	Cynthia Spooner, Concerned Citizen
Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, U.S. House of Representatives	

## PUBLIC TESTIMONY

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Ricky Forrest	James Tyson
Crystal Sowemimo	

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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League of Women Voters of Texas

## SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS (NOT EXHAUSTIVE)

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100 Black Men of America, Houston Metropolitan Chapter, Inc.	National Bar Association
Austin Black Lawyers Association	OCA Greater Houston Chapter
Earl Carl Institute for Legal and Social Policy, Inc.	Texas Southern University - Thurgood Marshall School of Law
Houston Area Urban League, Inc.	Texas State Conference of the NAACP
J.L. Turner Legal Association	
NAACP Houston Branch	
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.	
NAACP Region VI	

## TEXAS STATE HEARING HIGHLIGHTS

The National Commission on Voting Rights held a hearing on April 5, 2014, at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. Support from national and local partner organizations contributed to making the event a success. Approximately 50 people attended the four-hour hearing and heard from several panels of Texas-based witnesses. Testimony topics included voter suppression and intimidation tactics, voter identification (ID), redistricting resulting in voter dilution, as well as challenges facing students, voters with disabilities, and language minorities.

### I. Suppressive Voting Tactics

Maureen Haver, Common Cause Texas Board Director, testified about voter suppression tactics deployed in Harris County during the 2010 election cycle. Haver testified that certain groups, namely True the Vote, placed aggressive poll watchers solely at minority precincts to challenge voters. These poll watchers routinely challenged voters who did not have the same home address on their voter registration cards and driver's licenses, said Haver. Haver also testified that this type of challenge adversely impacts minorities and the poor because Houston has the second-highest rate of minority renters in the United States. Since it costs \$25 to update an address on a driver's license,<sup>1</sup> Haver said that this is an amount some voters are unable to routinely pay when they move. Ms. Carolyn Scantlebury, Former President of the Houston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, also testified about the intimidation of voters at the polls in Texas minority precincts and efforts that were made by poll watchers to mislead voters. Scantlebury gave one example where law enforcement had to be contacted due to intimidation tactics employed at the polls.

### II. Restrictive Voter ID Law in Texas

George Korbell, an attorney for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), testified about the disproportionate impact the Texas voter ID law has on minority groups. In particular, his organization researched how difficult it is for low-income minorities, lacking driver's licenses, to obtain free IDs. To determine this, LULAC compared the distance from the offices of Texas minority elected officials, including members of the state legislature, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, to the nearest Texas Department of Public Safety office, which provides free IDs to the general public. They determined that bus travel time averaged approximately two hours each way. Korbell also testified that in 100 rural Texas counties, they were unable to locate a nearby Texas Department of Public Safety

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<sup>1</sup> See, *Driver License Renewal and Change of Address, Texas Department of Public Safety*. <https://txapps.texas.gov/tolapp/tvcd/>

office accessible by public transportation. Rogene Gee Calvert, Director of the Texas Asian American Redistricting Initiative, also testified about the difficulties faced by Asian Americans as a result of the Texas voter ID law. These difficulties include the fact that many Asian-American seniors lack appropriate documentation to obtain an ID, encounter language barriers, must travel significant distances to obtain an ID, and endure long wait times at Department of Public Safety offices.

### **III. Dilution of Minority Voting Strength through Redistricting and Racially Polarized Voting**

Korbell also testified about the negative impact redistricting in Texas has had on minority voters. One example cited by Korbell was how redistricting in Tarrant County resulted in the dilution of Latino votes. Korbell also testified that, in his examination of Texas voting cases since 2010, he determined that there were instances of racially polarized voting in counties making up three-quarters of the State of Texas.