

04/06/2022

Elijah Stinehelfer



The Honorable Burt Jones  
Senate of the Georgia General Assembly



Dear Senator Jones,

I am a student at Middle Georgia State University living in Macon, GA. This semester I am specifically studying the right to participate in government in Georgia; more specifically, I have been studying the ways that recent changes in legislation impact the ability for people to exercise their rights in Georgia. As a part of that studying, I came across a bill currently being reviewed by the Senate labeled HR 1464, will make it possible for individuals to request PTO in order to go out and vote. However, that time is limited to two hours. I am concerned that this limitation will prevent people from taking PTO to vote.

NBC released an [article](#) in March of this year in which one couple explained that it took them eight hours in order to cast their ballot. Similarly, using my own life as an example, if I were working at MGA and requested the two-hour time off to go vote, I would spend up to forty minutes (fifteen to twenty minutes each way) traveling to my polling place, which would leave me only one hour and twenty minutes to vote assuming that traffic conditions were perfect. While this may be possible in a location with a smaller population, like Cochran, it would be nearly impossible in areas with larger populations. This is because [legislation](#) passed last year makes it more difficult for individuals to vote early, which will likely cause a spike in election day voting and longer lines during both early and regular voting.

A solution to this issue may be to increase the amount of PTO from two hours to six hours, which might offset some instances where individuals would not have enough time to vote. However, six hours is already the majority of the standard workday and may not be feasible for some employers to permit while still running their business. Instead, my proposal is that Georgia additionally institute a State Voting Day in line with the clearly established [federal election day](#), and grant Georgians the day off to vote; this is something that was done in [Virginia](#) and [Illinois](#) in 2020 to encourage voter turnout. The federal establishment of an election day allows a consistent routine for exercising our rights; making that day a holiday would mean that more people have the opportunity to exercise that right. There is evidence that in places like Puerto Rico, an election holiday could mean [voter turnout as high as 82%](#). There is, of course, no single solution to these complex problems, but a good first step would be attempting to meet people where they are and provide incentives — and opportunities — for people to exercise their rights.

Sincerely,

Elijah Stinehelfer