

GEORGIA ENACTS CHANGES TO NEW VOTING LAW

BY TRACEY STEPHENSON

Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed Senate Bill 202 into law. The 95-page bill adds new provisions to state election laws. Kemp stated, “With Senate bill 202, Georgia will take another step toward ensuring our elections are secure, accessible, and fair.” Republicans believe the bill will expand voter access. However, many other people and organizations argue that the election changes violate the federal Voting Rights Act and the constitutional right of free speech. The Democrats have equated the new bill with “Jim Crow” laws and is more about voter suppression.



Senator Reverend Warnock stated, “SBS 202 will allow for a hostile takeover of local boards of elections if the Georgia legislature, filled with politicians, doesn’t like the outcome of an election. It is anti-democratic, and it is un-American. They are trying to make it harder for people to vote rather than make it easier. It is the state legislature that is trying to take over local elections if they do not like the outcome. What is the purpose behind all of this? You are literally going to make public policy based on a lie? Based on the feeling that some people had that things shouldn’t turn out the way you wanted? I thought we made public policy based on fact. Our democracy is in a 911 emergency. I am not about to be stopped or stymied by debates about senate rules. It is a contradiction to say we must protect minority rights in the Senate, while right now here in Georgia they are trying to crush minority rights in society.”

Listed below is a summary of Senate Bill 202:

Voters must now have some form of identification to vote by mail. If the voter does not have the license or state ID, their date of birth and last four digits of their social security must be submitted with their ballot; if the voter does not have a Social Security number, they must include a photocopy of another form of accepted identification.

Election officials are not allowed to mail absentee ballot applications to voters unless they request one.

Voters can request a ballot starting 78 days before Election day. The deadline to request an absentee ballot is 11 days before Election Day.

Every county will have at least one dropbox. Drop boxes can now only be placed inside early voting locations and will only be available during voting hours. No more than one ballot dropbox per 100,000 active voters in every county.

Early voting can take place between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. during weekdays, but counties have the option to extend hours to 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Private parties are prohibited from handing out food and drink to voters standing in line to vote. It applies within 150 feet of a polling place or within 25 feet of any voter at a polling site. Election workers are allowed to set up self-service water stations for voters in line.

The state election board has the power to take over any county election office for underperforming. The general assembly has more say over the state election board. The bill also removes the chairmanship from the secretary of state and instead is a non-voting ex-officio member. Lawmakers will now be able to choose the chair.

Is Senate Bill 202 considered voter suppression or a better way of ensuring a fair election? You choose! Visit gov.georgia.gov and decide for yourself. Never allow change to stop you from voting!