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MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK IN SC: SESSION WINDING DOWN

We previously reported that recent discussions at the Election Laws Subcommittee of House Judiciary are encouraging for those of us concerned about elections and voting rights. We continue to be encouraged by dialogue with committee members. As previously promised, Chairman Jay Jordan held another subcommittee meeting last Thursday morning at which those who signed up to provide testimony on Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter's absentee voting bill H. 3822 were allowed time to complete their testimony. The meeting closed with Rep. Cobb-Hunter expressing optimism that we have a genuine opportunity for collaborative work to make elections more accessible for South Carolina's voters.

I share Rep. Cobb-Hunter's optimism. Earlier today, I spoke with Rep. Brandon Newton, primary sponsor of H. 4150. We discussed ways to move forward with his universal in-person early voting proposal, including appropriate revisions of excused absentee voting. For example, at present the bill eliminates our current excused absentee voting option for those out of town for work or pleasure on election day. We discussed an alternative. With a 14-day no-excuse early voting period in place, absence from home on election day alone would not qualify for excused absentee voting. However, absence throughout the combined early voting and election day voting periods would qualify an elector for excused absentee voting including voting by mail. We also discussed fair ways to ensure that counties meet acceptable standards of early voting locations in terms of numbers and locations, without disadvantaging any community or constituency.

After nine years representing the League of Women Voters at the SC State House, I've seen many early voting bills die on the vine, sometimes because a bill that had been good became problematic after amendment. I hope we can all work together to ensure that we move in a positive direction this time, towards more accessible elections for all our state's voters in 2022.

In addition to election issues, last week included an announcement from House Speaker Jay Lucas that July and August would be safe months for vacation. Any time after that is open season for a return to the State House, given the need to work on redistricting. Currently release of the data required for the redistricting process is scheduled for September 30.

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