



CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
JIMMY PATRONIS
STATE OF FLORIDA

September 23, 2020

Florida Elections Commission
107 West Gaines Street
Collins Building, Suite 224
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050

Dear Commissioners:

It has come to my attention that recent Democratic Presidential Candidate Michael Bloomberg has made widely publicized contributions to the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (“the Coalition”), a 501(c)3 organization. In turn, the Coalition is using Mr. Bloomberg’s contributions to pay off fines and fees owed by convicted felons. According to the Coalition’s press materials, Mr. Bloomberg’s contributions “will pay the fines and fees of tens of thousands of returning citizens so they will be eligible to vote and participate in this November’s Election” (sic).

Section 106.11(5), Florida Statutes, defines “contributions” as “[a] gift, subscription, conveyance, deposit, loan, payment, or distribution of money... *made for the purpose of influencing the results of an election or making an electioneering communication.*”

The Coalition website encourages individuals who have questions about its “Fines and Fees Program” to call 1-877-MYVOTE-0. On September 22, 2020, the Coalition distributed a press release (attached) containing the following statement:

As our democracy is under attack by so many *including the President* (emphasis added) a bipartisan supermajority of the people of Florida voted for Amendment 4 in order to expand democracy to returning citizens who had already served their sentences.

Chapter 106.011 Florida Statutes defines “Electioneering Communication”, in part, as a publicly distributed¹ communication that refers to or depicts a clearly identified candidate for office without expressly advocating election or defeat *that is susceptible of no reasonable interpretation other than an appeal to vote for or against a specific candidate, and is made within 60 days before a general election and is targeted to the relevant electorate in the geographic area the candidate would represent if elected.*

The excerpt quoted above can only be interpreted as an appeal to vote against President Trump. Additionally, since this is occurring within 60 days of the November 3 General Election, the Coalition is engaged in Electioneering Communications.

¹ Electioneering communications must be publicly distributed by a television station, radio station, cable television system, satellite system, newspaper magazine, direct mail, or telephone See s. 106.011(8)(a), Florida Statutes.

Florida Elections Commission
September 23, 2020
Page Two

Despite its non-profit status the Coalition must be treated as an Electioneering Communication Organization, as defined in Section 106.011(9), Florida Statutes. Combined with contributions by Mr. Bloomberg—an individual who has publicly committed hundreds of millions of dollars to partisan elections—the Coalition is engaging in purely partisan activities.

I believe these facts compel an investigation by the Florida Elections Commission into the legality of these contributions. This investigation at a minimum should determine whether the Coalition has complied with the compulsory reporting requirements for Electioneering Communications Organizations and whether the contributions received from Mr. Bloomberg have been appropriately reported to Florida's Division of Elections².

Given that the Commission is directed by statute to investigate referrals by the Division of Elections, and the Division of Elections is required to report "any apparent violation" of Chapter 106, Florida Statutes, I believe that the Commission is compelled to begin its investigation without delay since the information regarding the apparent violations (that the Division is required to refer³) is publicly available in the news media (see attached articles).

I thank and commend you for your service to the citizens of the State of Florida.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Patronis
Chief Financial Officer

Enclosure

c: Commissioner Joni Alexis Poitier, Vice Chair
Commissioner Barbra Stern
Commissioner Patricia Hollarn
Commissioner Kymberlee Curry Smith
Commissioner Jason Todd Allen
Commissioner J. Martin Hayes
Maria Matthews, Division Director, Elections
Florida Department of State

² See s. 106.0703(1)(a), F.S.

³ I have copied the Division of Elections on this request for their concurrence, pursuant to section 106.25, Florida Statutes, "[t]he Commission shall investigate...after having received...information reported to it under this subsection by the Division of Elections..." and section 106.22(7), Florida Statutes, "[r]eport to the Florida Elections Commission any failure to file a report or information required by this chapter or any apparent violation of this chapter."

For immediate release

September 22, 2020

Contact: Taylor Hopkins, (407) 675-6412, press@floridarrc.org

Brittany Bell, (202) 651-0130, brittany@spitfirestrategies.com

Massive Momentum Builds to Free the Vote in Florida

More than 44,000 individuals have contributed to FRRC's financial goal, including Church Groups, Corporate Leaders, Athletes, Actors and Musicians in the Effort to Defend Democracy in Florida

FRRC Surges Past \$20M Raised to Pay Fines and Fees for Returning Citizens to Make Sure They Are Eligible for Voter Registration

Today, on National Voter Registration Day -- and with less than two weeks to go before Florida's voter registration deadline on October 5th -- Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC) -- announces it has passed a crucial milestone of \$20M raised, of its \$25M goal. These donations will pay the fines and fees of tens of thousands of returning citizens so they will be eligible to register to vote and participate in this November's Election.

[Fueled by the 11th Circuit Court ruling](#) just 10 days ago, this grassroots movement has seen a surge of donations from all 50 states (and territories). More than 44,000 individuals have contributed towards FRRC's goal.

FRRC's expansive and diverse grassroots contributors were joined by an equally impressive and diverse group of supporters that donated or raised funds including prominent actors, athletes, business leaders, philanthropists, community organizations, church groups and others such as John Legend, LeBron James, Michael Jordan, Susie Buffett and The Sherwood Foundation, Mike Bloomberg, Erika Alexander, Camila Cabello, MTV, Comedy Central, VH1, Ben & Jerry's, Levi Strauss & Co., the Warner Music Group / Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund, Miami Dolphins, Orlando Magic, Miami Heat, Jarecki Family, One for Democracy, Mike Novogratz, Kate Capshaw & Steven Spielberg, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Jack Dorsey's #startsmall initiative, Marilyn and Jeffrey Katzenberg Foundation and many more.

This all-American effort to defend democracy and protect returning citizens' voting rights is a continuation of an organic grassroots effort that put Amendment 4 on the ballot and resulted in two-thirds of Florida voters approving it in 2018. That successful ballot initiative restored the voting rights of 1.4M returning citizens in the state, and was the largest expansion of voting rights in the United States in the past 50 years.

"This outpouring of support for returning citizens is reminiscent of the type of support we received from people from all walks of life during our Amendment 4 campaign. Just as in our campaign, this effort is

Be a Part of History

Stand up for Democracy



about placing people over politics. The democracy that we envision is not one where an American is forced to choose between putting food on the table or voting. The ability to vote should be unencumbered and free of charge. With this effort, we are creating a more inclusive democracy that we all can be proud of," said Desmond Meade, executive director of the Florida Rights and Restoration Coalition and author of [Let My People Vote](#).

John Legend, multi-award winning, platinum-selling singer-songwriter remarked, "When I launched FreeAmerica in 2015, people knew about the problem of felony disenfranchisement, but not enough was being done about it. Amendment 4 was a powerful initiative to extend the franchise to over a million citizens in the crucial state of Florida. They are subject to the laws and regulations enacted by their representatives. They live and work and pay taxes in their communities, but they were unable to participate in the elections in which those representatives were chosen. As our democracy is under attack by so many, including the President, a bipartisan supermajority of the people of Florida voted for Amendment 4 in order to expand democracy to returning citizens who had already served their sentences. I have been honored to be an early supporter of the Amendment and the work of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, and I'm so grateful for the monumental work FRRC has done to pass this amendment and make sure the intended effects are realized. Reaching this milestone today means more Floridians will be able to help chart the direction of this nation's future. While historians may look back at this moment and criticize the courts for allowing a pay-to-vote system, I hope they will also tell the story of how people across the country came together to extend and protect our democracy."

Michael Bloomberg added, "The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy and no American should be denied that right. Working together with the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, we are determined to end disenfranchisement and the discrimination that has always driven it."

Some of the most ardent supporters of the effort are friends and neighbors who want to see those who have returned home get back their most basic rights. Pastor Rhonda Thomas, from Miramar, and the Executive Director of Faith in Florida, has led fundraising efforts with pastors and churches across the state. "Church leaders all over the state are stepping up to help those who are unable to vote get their voice back. We believe in forgiveness, redemption and restoration, and cannot sit back and not do our part to support our neighbors, family members and loved ones become eligible to vote."

FRRC is making its final push and racing against the clock to raise the remaining \$5M to help pay off fees and fines by September 28, and encourages people to visit <https://wegotthevote.org/freethevote/> to make a donation.

###

FRRC will hold a press conference Wednesday September 23 to describe their plans for using this infusion of money to pay fines and fees, as well as their engagement efforts to get returning citizens registered. Email press@floridarrc.org to get details.



###

About The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition

FRRC is a grassroots, membership organization run by Returning Citizens (Formerly Convicted Persons) who are dedicated to ending the disenfranchisement and discrimination against people with convictions and creating a more comprehensive and humane reentry system that will enhance successful reentry, reduce recidivism, and increase public safety. For more information, visit <https://floridarrc.com/>.

