

HAVA Heart - Release the Early Voting Funds!

(EV)

In 2008, the State Board of Elections used more than \$1 million in federal funds to expand Early Voting opportunities across North Carolina. The money came from a large grant received under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to improve election systems. The Elections Board used the money (along with over \$2 million provided by the Democratic-controlled General Assembly in 2008) for grants to county election boards to add scores of Early Voting sites, expand their hours/days, and buy new equipment to efficiently run Same-Day Registration at EV sites.

Today, there is still over \$4 million of HAVA money in a NC government bank account. But Republican leaders in the General Assembly have frozen the HAVA account and won't let the State Board of Elections use it to ensure that North Carolina doesn't become the next Florida.

Ironically, Congress passed HAVA to prevent another Florida Fiasco. The law set minimum standards for election administration and voter registration. There are different pots of HAVA money – for example, to ensure access to voting for people with disability. The biggest pot (Title II) is for computerized, statewide voter registration/record systems, purchasing and maintaining compliant voting machines, and improving central office and poll-site election administration. *disabilities*

To ensure that Title II HAVA funds were not just used to replace existing state funding, HAVA requires states to maintain their core election budgets at no less than their 2000 level. HAVA funds can only be used as long as the state appropriates its Maintenance of Effort (MOE) level of funding. (Private funding would not release HAVA money; it must be a state appropriation.) *2000*

The MOE for North Carolina – the core budget of the State Board of Elections – is \$3.46 million per year. But the General Assembly purposely went below that level by funding the MOE with only \$2.79 million for each year of the 2010-2012 biennium – or about \$660,000 less than the MOE required. The General Assembly also adopted a provision in the state budget saying that the Board of Elections can not use Title II HAVA funds until the MOE threshold is met. *2011-2013*

We must launch a campaign to release the HAVA funds for quality Early Voting plans.

* **The needed MOE money is not hard to find:** More than \$400,000 is in a fund Republican legislators have their eyes on for implementing a photo ID system.

* **Experts are on our side:** County boards of elections know about the frozen funds and they're worried. The \$4 million in HAVA money would also greatly help them with machine upgrades, training, software, etc. – so it's not all for EV sites. The local election boards are worried about relying on money from already strained county commissioners. They will tell media/etc. that a weak EV plan will push more voters, problems and stress onto Election Day.

* **Media/editorialists** will jump on this: Penny wise, pound foolish; NC as the next FL; exposes the selfish, partisan agenda of Republicans; fits into the larger story of voter suppression, etc.

* **Public will be mad:** EV is very popular and freezing funds for EV is the core story. The funds to improve accessibility for people with disabilities are sub-part of Title II and are also frozen!

* **We win even if we lose:** Even if we don't get the money, this fight hits GOP where they are most vulnerable to public anger over appearing to suppress voting; it will help with the ID fight.

* **There is other EV money:** There is still \$1.6 million in Title I HAVA money that does not require MOE and the State Board of Elections can use for grants. But that's only about \$16,000 per county. We really need at least \$3 million for a decent EV plan, \$4 million for a good one.