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Florida's Election Reforms Set the Gold Standard for the Nation

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Florida set an example for all states to follow on Election Day 2020. From the time the state's 67 county Supervisors of Elections began receiving ballots in early October and until the final votes were tallied, Florida voters experienced a smooth and secure election. Voters went to bed on election night trusting that their election officials counted their vote accurately and

that the election results reflected the will of the people.

In 2020, Florida's election officials processed and reported more than 11 million votes—the third largest total in the nation—on time and by the book. Florida's election officials had a repeat performance in 2022. This type of success did not happen overnight. Elections administration is

a twenty-four-seven, 365-days-a-year job—not only during regularly scheduled election years, but in off-election years as well.

The foundation of Florida's election administration is a robust election code. Governor DeSantis has enacted sensible and effective reforms geared toward enhancing election integrity, in partnership with Florida's 67 Supervisors of Elections and the Florida Legislature. These new laws have resulted in a higher degree of transparency, a reduction in election fraud, and ultimately, more secure elections.

Instead of resting on our laurels after the 2020 election, in 2021, Florida took proactive measures to beef up election integrity. Senate Bill (SB) 90 was the first package of election reforms that Governor DeSantis signed. We became one of the first states to prohibit deep-pocketed interest groups like “Zuckerbucks” from meddling in or influencing elections.

Florida voters have three options to vote – vote-by-mail (VBM), early vote, or vote on Election Day. Regardless of voting method, we do not and could not tolerate the same potential for fraud that we saw in other states. With the increased popularity of VBM, the Legislature crafted laws to make this convenient form of voting as secure as possible. SB90 shortened the effective period for a mail ballot request, required an additional voter identifier to authenticate a request, prohibited mailing a VBM ballot without a request on record, and limited the number of VBM ballots an individual could lawfully collect or return on behalf of someone other than himself or herself. To guard against vandalism and tampering of VBM drop boxes stationed at Supervisors

of Elections' offices and designated early voting sites, Florida created Secure Ballot Intake Stations that must be monitored in person, full-time.

In 2022, SB524 delivered the Legislature's second package of election reforms. Among other things, it raised the cap on fines assessed to third-party voter registration organizations (3PVROs) for late returns or failure to return collected voter registration applications, and, stiffened criminal penalties for ballot harvesting and signature forgery. SB524 also continued our ongoing effort to maintain clean voter rolls by streamlining the address list maintenance process and expanding data sharing between governmental agencies regarding potentially ineligible voters.

Since this law was passed, Florida has removed over 1.5 million active and inactive voters. The ability to promptly and accurately maintain clean voter rolls is a major reform championed by Governor DeSantis. Properly maintained voter rolls are essential to building confidence in the outcome of our elections.

The crown jewel of SB524 was the creation of the Office of Election Crimes and Security (OECS) in the Secretary of State's office. The bill established OECS to investigate credible allegations of election law violations and irregularities. Employing investigators with specialized knowledge of Florida's election laws, the sole focus of OECS is to safeguard the integrity of Florida's elections.

Since the office was implemented, OECS has referred over 1,400 cases to law enforcement which has led to the arrests and convictions of felon voters, noncitizen

voters, and voters who cast multiple votes. Additionally, OECS investigations have resulted in significant financial penalties for 3PVRs and petition circulators who violate our laws and victimize voters.

In 2023, Governor DeSantis signed SB7050 into law, representing the third major package of election reforms since 2020. SB7050 built upon our accomplishments by leveraging the collaborative wisdom of Florida's election officials and lawmakers. SB7050 enhanced voter roll integrity by requiring Supervisors of Elections to conduct annual review of residential addresses, and to additionally report suspected election crimes within their jurisdiction to OECS. To guard against signature forgery on election documents, the bill created a mandatory signature matching /verification training for election personnel.

In addition to these election reforms, Florida is also ahead of the curve when it comes to emergency response and preparedness. Because election season coincides with hurricane season, Florida is prepared for all contingencies.

When hurricanes hit during the last two general election cycles, Florida took the necessary steps to ensure that voters had the ability to vote. In 2024, Florida experienced three major Hurricanes in the span of three months – Debbie, Helene and Milton. The latter two significantly destroyed

polling sites, displaced voters from their homes, and severely damaged infrastructure—and the elections still went on.

Executive Orders are the key to continuity. Governor DeSantis has used his Executive Order powers to permit flexibility, while also maintaining the high standard of election integrity underlying our laws. We do not move or delay elections in Florida, but we do ensure voters affected by emergencies still have the ability to vote.

In fair or foul weather, Florida's elections are built on a foundation of transparency. This is what we get right more than any other state. We welcome and encourage the public, campaign officials, and the candidates to observe our election process at every critical phase.

The election reforms championed by Governor DeSantis have resulted in greater transparency, reductions in election crimes, and heightened election security. The downstream effects of these laws are countless, but chief among them is a high degree of voter confidence in our elections. As we look toward the 2026 election season, Florida remains committed to honing our election code and setting the national standard for election integrity.

Cord Byrd serves as Florida's Secretary of State.