

## HAVA Heart - Release the Early Voting Funds!

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 Title II funds that NC 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 (EV) sites, train poll workers, and buy new equipment to efficiently run Same-Day Registration at EV sites.

Today, there is still over \$4 million of HAVA Title II money in a NC 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 make sure North Carolina doesn't become the next Florida.

Ironically, Congress passed HAVA in 2002 to prevent another Florida Fiasco. The law establishes minimum standards for voter registration and election administration. There are different pots of HAVA money – e.g., to ensure access to voting for people with a 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.

To ensure that Title II funds are 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 if the state appropriates its Maintenance of Effort (MOE) level of funding.

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 2011-2013 biennium – or about \$660,000 less than the MOE requires. The legislature also adopted a provision in the state budget (Section 26.1) saying the Board of Elections can not use HAVA Title II funds until the MOE funds “are appropriated.”

**We need the General Assembly to release the HAVA funds for grants to support strong Early Voting plans, to staff and equip accessible polling places, and to train poll workers.**

\* ***The 2012 election will be intense.*** North Carolina is a battleground state; turnout will be high. The new districts and large number of split precincts further complicate election administration. A weak EV plan will push more voters, problems, and stress onto Election Day. North Carolina could become the next Florida. Taxpayers will pay dearly for election mistakes and reruns.

\* ***Help voters, don't suppress voting:*** More than \$400,000 of the needed MOE funds can easily be found in a fund that Republican legislators have their eyes on for implementing a proposed photo ID requirement for voters. It's the money left in the Voter-Owned Elections Fund.

\* ***Local elections officials need help:*** Many county boards of elections are worried that strained county budgets won't be able to pay for equipment maintenance and licensing fees and EV sites needed for a smooth election. They need the grants that HAVA Title II provides, as it did in 2008.

\* ***Public will be mad:*** EV is very popular; GOP leaders hope to quietly freeze funds for EV. The funds to improve access for people with disabilities are a sub-part of Title II and are also frozen.

\* ***Returning Title II makes no sense:*** Some GOP lawmakers would like to return the HAVA money to the federal government. But the money is here, designed to improve NC elections.