

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR NORTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
Tallahassee Division**

**ROSEMARY OSBORNE MCCOY
and SHEILA SINGLETON,
individually and on behalf of those
similarly situated,**

Plaintiffs,

v.

**RONALD DION DESANTIS, in his
official capacity as Governor of
Florida; LAUREL M. LEE, in her
official capacity as Secretary of State
of Florida; and MIKE HOGAN, in
his official capacity as Supervisor of
Elections for Duval County, Florida.**

Defendants.

Case No. _____

COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

Plaintiffs bring this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, and allege as follows:

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. ROSEMARY MCCOY and SHEILA SINGLETON, both registered voters in Duval County, Florida, challenge the State of Florida's concerted, unrelenting effort and latest endeavor to deny them the right to vote based purely on their low-income economic status. Plaintiffs contest the state's attempt through

recently enacted Senate Bill 7066 to relegate them to second-class citizens who

subjective executive clemency process that individuals in Plaintiffs' situation would otherwise face.

5. Amendment 4 was widely celebrated all over the country for enfranchising the greatest number of people—an estimated 1.4 to 1.6 million—through a single law since the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

6. Within six months of Amendment 4's passage and effective date, the Florida legislature passed Senate Bill 7066, a measure specifically designed to confuse, complicate and reduce the number of people eligible to vote under Amendment 4. Specifically, Senate Bill 7066 requires individuals convicted of a felony, other than murder or a sexual felony offense, to satisfy all of their legal financial obligations (LFOs) as a precondition to getting their voting rights restored. This is in direct contravention of the clear and unambiguous language in Amendment 4 which mandates the automatic restoration of voting rights to those who have completed the term of their sentence. Florida legislators enacted Senate Bill 7066 despite oral testimony, letters, repeated phone calls to elected officials, and a massive public outcry in opposition to the bill.

7. By enacting Senate Bill 7066, the Florida legislature completely ignored and undermined the will of the people, including their own constituents who overwhelmingly supported Amendment 4.

8. This lawsuit seeks to vindicate Plaintiffs' rights and the rights of all similarly situated individuals who would be eligible to vote pursuant to Amendment 4 and who now, under Senate Bill 7066, face the loss of that fundamental right. Plaintiffs' claims for relief are brought under the Fourteenth,

VENUE

12. Venue is proper in this District under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because all Defendants reside in Florida.

13. This case is properly filed in the Tallahassee Division pursuant to Northern District of Florida Local Rule 3.1(A)–(B), because Defendants DESANTIS and LEE have their principal place of business in this Division.

THE PARTIES

Plaintiffs

14. Plaintiff ROSEMARY MCCOY, is a resident of Duval County, Florida. In July 2015, she was convicted in the Fourth Judicial Circuit Court in Duval County, Florida of three felony offenses. None of these offenses involved a conviction for murder or a felony sexual offense. She was sentenced to serve a concurrent sentence for all three felony offenses as follows: 24 months of incarceration, including time served, and 18 months of probation. The court also ordered her to pay costs, fines, and fees in the amount of \$666.

15. Plaintiff MCCOY completed her term of incarceration in March 2016 and completed probation in September 2017. She is no longer under the

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registration card from the Duval County Supervisor of Elections office and has

20. Plaintiff SINGLETON completed her term of incarceration in June 2011 and completed probation in July 2014. She is no longer under the supervision of the Florida Department of Corrections.

21. Following Amendment 4's passage, Plaintiff SINGLETON registered to vote in Duval County. In February 2019, she received a voter registration card from the Duval County Supervisor of Elections office. She has since voted in a countywide election. Upon information and belief, her ballot was counted.

22. In May 2019, the Duval County Clerk of Court informed her that she owes \$987.64 in court-ordered costs, fines and fees associated with her criminal sentence. The county clerk also informed her that she owes \$14,913.05 in victim restitution, plus any and all interest that continues to accrue on the principal amount owed.

23. Because of Plaintiff SINGLETON's criminal history, it has been extremely difficult for her to obtain gainful employment. Therefore, she lacks the financial resources to pay off the victim restitution she owes. If Senate Bill 7066 is enforced, Plaintiff SINGLETON is in jeopardy of being removed from the voter rolls and prosecuted if she attempts to re-register and vote in a future election.

Defendants

24. Defendant RONALD DION DESANTIS is sued in his official capacity as Governor of the State of Florida. As Governor, Defendant DESANTIS

is responsible for the enforcement of all laws of the State of Florida, including Amendment 4 (codified as Fla. Const., art. VI, § 4) and Senate Bill 7066 (amending Fla. Stat. § 98.075(5)). He also has a constitutional duty to protect Plaintiffs' fundamental right to vote. Fla. Const. art. IV, § 1.

26. Defendant MIKE HOGAN is sued in his official capacity as the Supervisor of Elections for Duval County and is responsible for conducting voter registration and elections in the county. Senate Bill 7066 requires Defendant HOGAN to “verify and make a final determination . . . regarding whether the person who registers to vote is eligible pursuant to [Amendment 4]” Fla. Stat. § 98.0751(3)(b). He is also responsible for maintaining the county’s voter registration rolls, which include removing from the voter rolls individuals deemed no longer eligible to vote under state law.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

Passage of Amendment 4

27. Florida’s history of denying people with criminal convictions the right to vote dates back to its 1845 constitution. However, it was the expansion of its criminal disenfranchisement provision in 1868 that contributed in significant part to African Americans being disproportionately disenfranchised.

28. For years, legislation was introduced to streamline the state’s rights restoration scheme, without any success. Moreover, in 2018, the state’s clemency process was found to be “fatally flawed.” *Hand v. Scott*, 315 F. Supp. 3d 1244, 1248 (N.D. Fla. 2018). As a result, Floridians turned to the state constitution which allows for citizens to amend the constitution by way of a ballot initiative.

29. The Florida constitution requires that, in order for a ballot initiative to be successful, (1) sufficient petitions must be signed and verified; (2) the state supreme court must approve the language upon a specific finding that the ballot initiative’s language is clear, unambiguous, and provides sufficient detail so that voters know exactly what they are voting for; and (3) passage by at least 60% of all those who voted in a general election. Fla. Const. art. IV, § 10; art. XI, §§ 3, 5.

30. On April 20, 2017, the Florida Supreme Court ruled that “the chief purpose of [Amendment 4] is to automatically restore voting rights to felony offenders, except those convicted of murder or felony sexual offences, upon completion of all terms of their sentence.” Advisory Opinion to the Attorney Gen. Re: Voting Restoration Amendment, 215 So. 3d 1202, 1208 (Fla. 2017).

31. The Florida Supreme Court has held that there is a presumption that provisions of the state constitution are self-executing. *Browning v. Fla. Hometown Democracy, Inc.*, 29 So. 3d 1053, 1064 (Fla. 2010) (“[C]onstitutional provisions are presumed self-executing to prevent the Legislature from nullifying the will of the people as expressed in their Constitution.”); *Fla. Hosp. Waterman v. Buster*, 984 So. 2d 478, 485–86 (Fla. 2008) (“[I]n the absence of such presumption the legislature would have the power to nullify the will of the people expressed in their constitution, the most sacrosanct of all expressions of the people.”).

<https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/de>

38. After the county supervisor of elections receives the voter registration application, the county “must notify [the] applicant of the disposition of the . . . application within 5 business days after voter registration information is entered into the statewide voter registration system.” *Id.* § 97.073(1). The notice should “inform the applicant that the application has been approved, is incomplete, has been denied, or is a duplicate of a current registration.” *Id.* “If the application is incomplete, the supervisor must request that the applicant supply the missing information using a voter registration application signed by the applicant.” *Id.*

39. Plaintiffs MCCOY and SINGLETON registered to vote—and voted—following Amendment 4’s January 8, 2018 effective date. Because they have satisfied all the conditions of their felony sentences, and because Amendment 4 is self-executing, Plaintiffs are legally entitled to vote pursuant to Fla. Const. art. VI § 4.

Passage of Senate Bill 7066

40. Even though almost 65% of Floridians voted in favor of Amendment 4, members of the Florida legislature immediately began plans to dismantle the new law.

41. At the start of Florida’s legislative session, there were several bills introduced to complicate the otherwise automatic rights registration scheme

Amendment 4 created. Senate Bill 7066 was eventually approved by both houses and signed by the Governor on June 28, 2019.

42. During the hearings on the anti-Amendment 4 bills, legislators who supported these bills acknowledged that Florida lacks a centralized database that shows whether a person owes LFOs, the total amount of LFOs owed, and what, if any, of the total amount has been paid.

43. Representative James Grant and Senator Keith Perry refused to

thereby punishes individuals like Plaintiffs MCCOY and SINGLETON who are unable to pay off their LFOs and deprives them of their fundamental right to vote solely because “through no fault of [their] own, [they] cannot pay the fine.”

Bearden v. Georgia, 461 U.S. 660, 673 (1983).

51. For individuals like Plaintiffs MCCOY and SINGLETON who owe thousands of dollars in LFOs and lack the means to satisfy those payments, Senate Bill 7066 imposes an excessive fine and punitive burden on their ability to vote. Based on their current economic status, Plaintiffs will most likely never be able to vote again.

52. Senate Bill 7066 also requires county supervisors of elections to “verify and make a final determination . . . regarding whether the person who registers to vote is eligible pursuant” to Amendment 4, Fla. Stat. § 98.0751(3)(b) (2019), but the bill does not set forth any standard, guidelines, or other clear directive to county supervisors of elections for how to carry out this broad delegation of authority.

53. Meanwhile, Florida’s supervisors of elections are publicly known to adopt varying internal policies and practices when it comes to the enforcement of election laws, most recently highlighted in the varying treatment of vote-by-mail ballots in different counties. *See e.g., Vote-by-Mail Ballots Cast in Florida*, ACLU

of Florida & Prof. Daniel A. Smith (Sept. 19, 2018),

[https://www.aclufll.org/sites/default/files/aclufll - vote by mail - report.pdf](https://www.aclufll.org/sites/default/files/aclufll_-_vote_by_mail_-_report.pdf).

Senate Bill 7066’s Impact on Communities of Color and Lower Income People

54. Racial bias is prevalent in Florida’s criminal justice system. In addition, people experiencing poverty are over-represented at every level of the system and often exit prison and complete parole or probation further in debt than when they were arrested and convicted.

55. In the past 15 years, Florida has increased the number of criminal offenses for which courts are statutorily mandated to impose LFOs. Moreover, many of these LFOs are imposed regardless of whether a criminal defendant can afford to satisfy those obligations. *See, e.g., id.* § 938.27(2)(a) (imposing on defendant costs of prosecution and investigation “notwithstanding the defendant’s present ability to pay”); § 938.29(1)(b) (requiring defendant to pay attorneys’ fees and costs in full “notwithstanding the defendant’s present ability to pay”).

56. Florida law enforcement officials are notori “ ” or bebe

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Disenfranchisement, 2016, available at

and Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People, Prison

CAUSES OF ACTION

COUNT ONE

Violation of Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause (Wealth-based discrimination)

64. Plaintiffs hereby reallege and incorporate by reference each allegation contained in the preceding paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.

65. The Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause provides: "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; [] nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1.

66. "[A] citizen has a constitutionally protected right to participate in elections on an equal basis with other citizens in the jurisdiction." *Dunn v. Blumstein*, 405 U.S. 330, 336 (1972).

67. Wealth "is not germane to one's ability to participate intelligently in the electoral process." *Harper v. Virginia State Bd. of Elections*, 383 U.S. 663, 668 (1966). A state "violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment whenever it makes the w l M

Thus, Senate Bill 7066 has an even more harmful impact on Plaintiffs MCCOY and SINGLETON as low-income women of color.

75. If Plaintiffs were wealthy and had the financial means to fully satisfy their LFOs, they would be eligible to vote under Senate Bill 7066. Therefore, Senate Bill 7066 discriminates against and/or disproportionately impacts Plaintiffs based solely on their level of economic wealth, or lack thereof. Thus, Senate Bill 7066 violates the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.

76. There is no compelling governmental interest or rational basis for denying Plaintiffs the right to vote solely based on their lower income status.

77. In addition to violating the Equal Protection Clause's plain language, public policy favors a finding that Senate Bill 7066 is unconstitutional.

COUNT TWO

Violation of Twenty-Fourth Amendment (Unconstitutional Poll Tax)

78. Plaintiffs hereby reallege and incorporate by reference each allegation contained in the preceding paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.

79. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states: “[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the

United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.”

U.S. Const. amend. XXIV, § 1.

80. In passing the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, Congress enacted a permanent prohibition on a state’s use of wealth as a qualification to vote. *See Harman v. Forssenius*, 380 U.S. 528, 540-41 (1965) (“[T]he Twenty-fourth [Amendment] nullifies sophisticated as well as simple-minded modes of impairing the right guaranteed.” (internal quotation marks omitted)).

81. The term “poll tax” in the Twenty-Fourth Amendment was never intended to apply to a narrow category of fees imposed on a person in order to vote. *See U.S. v. State Tax Comm’n of Miss.*, 421 U.S. 599, 606 (1975) (noting that the “standard definition of a tax” is any “enforced contribution to provide for the support of government”). The term “poll tax” expressly and implicitly covers Senate Bill 7066’s requirement that Plaintiffs satisfy all of their financial obligations as a precondition to vote.

82. Senate Bill 7066 is a modern day “poll tax” that, in operation, denies people the right to vote based on their economic status.

83. There is no compelling governmental interest or rational basis for denying individuals the right to vote solely based on their lower income status.

84. In addition to violating the Twenty-Fourth Amendment’s plain language, public policy favors a finding that Senate Bill 7066 is unconstitutional.

COUNT THREE

**Violation of Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection
& Due Process Clauses**

89. Plaintiffs lack the financial resources to satisfy their financial obligations as a precondition to vote.

90. Senate Bill 7066 deprives Plaintiffs of their fundamental right to vote without, at the very least, requiring the state first determine—at a hearing where Plaintiffs have notice and an opportunity to be heard—whether Plaintiffs have the ability to pay and willfully refused to do so prior to depriving them of their right to vote.

91. Therefore, Senate Bill 7066 deprives Plaintiffs’ of notice and a meaningful opportunity to be heard and violates the fundamental fairness requirements of the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.

COUNT FOUR

Violation of Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause (Void for Vagueness)

92. Plaintiffs hereby reallege and incorporate by reference each allegation contained in the preceding paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.

93. The Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause requires laws that impose penalties to define the offense with sufficient definiteness that ordinary people can understand what conduct is prohibited and in a manner that does not encourage arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement. *See Grayned v. City of*

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an enactment is void for vagueness if its prohibitions are not clearly defined.” *Id.* at 108.

94. Plaintiffs are eligible to vote under Amendment 4 and registered to vote in Duval County. Defendant HOGAN’S office concluded Plaintiffs were eligible to vote and approved their voter registration applications. The process was straightforward, efficient, and easily administered.

95. In contrast, Senate Bill 7066 creates confusion regarding the proper interpretation and enforcement of Amendment 4.

96. Senate Bill 7066’s delegation of authority to county supervisors of elections is also so extensive that it will lead to arbitrary and inconsistent decisions as to a person’s eligibility to vote.

97. As a result, Senate Bill 7066 is void for vagueness under the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause.

COUNT FIVE

Violation of the Eighth Amendment (Prohibition on excessive fines and cruel and unusual punishment)

98. Plaintiffs hereby reallege and incorporate by reference each allegation contained in the preceding paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.

99. The Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides: “Excessive bail shall not be required,

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**pro hac vice motion forthcoming*