

December 21, 2018

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Florida Governor-elect
420 East Jefferson Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

The Florida Cabinet
The Office of Executive Clemency
Florida Commission on Offender Review
4070 Esplanade Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2450

Dear Governor-elect and Florida Cabinet:

The Tampa City Council has been deeply troubled by reports that the intent and effect of Amendment 4 will be delayed.

While any delay is clearly contrary to the scope of the obvious intent of the nearly two out of three Floridians who supported this initiative, the delay that we understand is in the works will actually deny voting rights to many Tampanians in our forthcoming City of Tampa elections.

The two month delay that you spoke of in an interview with the Palm Beach Post would deny voting rights in our forthcoming City of Tampa Mayor's and City Council races.

This is an Amendment which received overwhelming bipartisan support. Here in Tampa, we are proud that the Tampa Bay Young Republicans formally endorsed Amendment 4. This Amendment was not about left or right, but all about right and wrong.

As we are sure you agree, to understand the moral scope of such a frivolous delay, one must understand why Amendment 4 was necessary in the first place. This constitutional provision denying felons voting rights was passed roughly 150 years ago, in the aftermath of the Civil War when the Reconstruction Congress mandated that the State of Florida expand voting rights. In response to this mandate, Florida did this, but with a wide series of restrictions. While many of these restrictions would eventually fall, felon restrictions continued.

And they continued in a way that made Florida stand out and for all of the wrong reasons. Nationally, 6 million Americans are unable to vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws. 1.6 million of those Americans hail from Florida. Think of it: While Florida constitutes 2% of states, and about 8% of all Americans, we take up about 25% of felons who are unable to vote.

Before Amendment 4, we were one of a handful of states with such punitive laws. Take the State of Texas. Texas has about 7 million more residents than Florida, but 1.1 million fewer felons who are unable to vote.

As you know, our State is one with a shameful history of voting rights and civil rights. We are the State of Harry T. Moore and Harriette Moore, who were murdered on Christmas night, 1951, for their role in advocating for voting rights through the Florida NAACP. From 1877 to 1950, among southern states, Florida led the nation in per capita rates of lynchings. And here in Tampa, we are home to numerous great Tampanians who risked their lives to fight for equality - great Floridians like Senator Arthenia Joyner, Delano Stewart, Robert Saunders, Warren Dawson, Francisco Rodriguez and so many others.

We ask that you do not delay this pivotal bi-partisan moral issue and allow the clear language of Amendment 4 to take effect. Please implement Amendment 4 now so that those Tampanians who, prior to Amendment 4's passage, would be unable to vote in our City elections will be able to vote.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Frank Reddick, Chairman
District 5