

September 18, 2017

Honorable Terry McAuliffe
1111 E Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Secretary Nancy Rodrigues
PO Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor McAuliffe and Secretary Rodrigues,

The integrity and security of our elections is of foremost importance. The fair and impartial administration of elections is critical to making sure every citizen has the opportunity to make his or her voice heard. Virginia has an important election coming up on November 7th and citizens of the commonwealth must have every assurance that it will be conducted in a free, fair, and accessible manner. That is why our organizations were dismayed and concerned to see a recent news article in the *Winchester Star* quoting a member of the State Board of Elections making alarming allegations regarding the integrity of our elections while explicitly advocating for one political party.

According to a the *Winchester Star*, State Board of Elections' Vice Chair Clara Belle Wheeler spoke to the Winchester-Frederick-Clarke Republican Women's Club on Wednesday, September 6th. Her remarks, as reported by the paper in an article dated September 7th, include allegations of "massive, well-organized, well-orchestrated voter fraud" with an assertion that such tactics are a condoned tactic of a single political party. The *Winchester Star* also reported Ms. Wheeler engaged in partisan politicking, advocating for the election of members of one political party over another.

These statements raise grave concerns regarding Ms. Wheeler's impartiality as well as serious conflicts of interest. The State Board of Elections "is authorized to supervise, coordinate, and adopt regulations governing the work of local electoral boards, registrars, and officers of election; to provide electronic application for voter registration and delivery of absentee ballots to eligible military and overseas voters; to establish and maintain a statewide automated voter registration system to include procedures for ascertaining current addresses of registrants; to prescribe standard forms for registration, transfer and identification of voters; and to require cancellation of records for registrants no longer qualified."¹ Those responsibilities are critical to the administration of our elections and require fair and impartial decision making by board members to ensure every qualified voter has the opportunity to participate in our democracy.

¹ <http://www.elections.virginia.gov/board/index.html>

Ms. Wheeler's words and assertions cast a pall over her decision-making and votes as a board member, raising the question whether she is unduly influenced by promoting a partisan political agenda over the best interests of Virginia voters. Unfortunately, this is not the first time Ms. Wheeler has conducted herself in an unethical and perhaps unlawful manner. According to *Cville Weekly*, in 2012 Wheeler violated a court order and confidentiality provisions in photocopying jury questionnaires in a campaign to purge Albemarle County voters.

Concerns regarding the fairness and impartiality of Virginia's elections are serious and must be addressed immediately. We, the undersigned, ask your office to please expeditiously develop and communicate a plan to mitigate Ms. Wheeler's demonstrated conflicts of interest to ensure all Virginians may have confidence in the integrity and security of our elections.

Sincerely,

Progress Virginia Education Fund
League of Women Voters of Virginia
Fair Elections Legal Network
Virginia Civic Engagement Table