

Bloomberg and Proskauer Sponsor Equal Justice Works Fellow at the ACLU Voting Rights Project

Proskauer For Good on June 17, 2024

Bloomberg and Proskauer are sponsoring Equal Justice Works Fellow Clay Pierce, who will work at the American Civil Liberties Union Voting Rights Project. Clay, a recent graduate of Columbia Law School, will work to advance voting rights for people with disabilities who are adversely affected by state laws that limit and criminalize voter assistance.

Millions of adults across the United States live with a disability. People with disabilities routinely rely on neighbors, friends or institutional staff to help them request and return their absentee ballots, as some disabilities limit their ability to do so independently. Some state laws disenfranchise disabled voters by prohibiting — and even criminalizing — this necessary assistance. For example, in [Missouri](#), one can return a voter's absentee ballot only if they are "a relative within the second degree of consanguinity or affinity" of the voter. For disabled individuals in Missouri who are unable to return their absentee ballots on their own and who do not have relatives fitting Missouri's specified criterion, this can mean that they effectively lose their right to vote.

A [study](#) conducted at Rutgers and commissioned by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission found that one in seven voters with disabilities reported difficulties voting in the 2022 midterms, and disabled voters were 15% more likely than non-disabled voters to encounter difficulties. Laws that restrict ballot request and return assistance make it even harder for individuals with disabilities to cast their ballots, a consequence that could potentially deter people with disabilities from voting.

The Fellowship

During Clay's fellowship, he will work directly with voters impacted by restrictive assistance laws to bring claims under [Section 208](#) of the Voting Rights Act, which protects the right to assistance for those who need it from a "person of the voter's choice." Clay will also develop public education materials and work with ACLU staff affiliates and other advocates to help prevent passage of additional harmful laws.

Clay is committed to the fight for an inclusive, multiracial democracy, a goal which voter assistance restrictions can certainly harm. In his own words, “The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with voters with disabilities to help advance their full access to the franchise.” Clay draws inspiration from generations of civil rights advocates, as well as the voters he serves.

Equal Justice Works

Equal Justice Works partners each fellow with a host organization and a sponsor who work together to tackle unmet legal needs. Clay’s host, the ACLU Voting Rights Project, is a national voting rights organization and, therefore, is well suited to address voting rights issues across multiple states. Bloomberg and Proskauer not only sponsor the fellowship, but also bring crucial pro bono capacity to the project.

Proskauer intern Joseph A. Colarusso assisted with this post.

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