CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner
Mayor

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January 30, 2019

The Honorable Ann Harris Bennett
Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector
1001 Preston St.
Suite 100
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Tax Assessor-Collector Bennett,

The City of Houston is the most diverse city in America. We draw our strength from our diversity, and we take pride in our ability to attract people from all over the world. One out of every four Houstonians is foreign born. We are a global community. Many of our friends, coworkers and neighbors are legal immigrants and naturalized citizens. They likely chose our city, at least in part, for its ability to absorb and celebrate many cultures. Now our state has chosen to insult and demean them. The Secretary of State's recently announced policy undermines our very identity and serves to frustrate the considerable progress we've made in creating a thriving, prospering metropolis.

The Secretary of State's advisory recommends counties mail letters requesting proof of citizenship to a list of people who are registered to vote but who were not citizens when they first obtained a driver's license. As many as 95,000 people statewide were slated for an arbitrary demand that they prove their citizenship or lose voting rights. The State's advisory recommends they be removed from the voting rolls if they don't provide proof within thirty days.

More than 50,000 people a year become U.S. citizens in Texas. There is nothing suspicious about an individual being registered to vote even though he or she was once listed as a non-citizen – *as far back as 1996*. It stands to reason that the vast majority of these people are simply among the hundreds of thousands who have become naturalized U.S. citizens.

These actions by Texas Secretary of State David Whitley and Attorney General Ken Paxton have placed Houston voters — who have followed every federal and state procedure for voter registration — under suspicion of violating election laws. They are essentially being asked to prove their own innocence, and will have a *constitutional right* taken away if they don't comply within a short time frame. Disenfranchising naturalized U.S. citizens based on inaccurate, outdated, and arbitrary data is wrong.

State officials have already had to acknowledge widespread errors in their initial list of 95,000 names. As you are aware, more than 60 percent of the 30,000 names supplied to Harris County have already been removed. There's no reason to have faith in this manifestly slapdash process.

I urge you to resist carrying out this short-sighted policy that degrades the very people who have worked so hard to meet our citizenship requirements and play by the rules.

Sincerely,

Sylvester Turner
Mayor

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