



February 26, 2020

Dr. Diane Trautman, Harris County Clerk
201 Caroline St., 3rd Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Re: Protecting the First Amendment

Dear Ms. Trautman:

On February 22, 2020, your office sent the attached message via the electronic poll book system forbidding all Early Voting election workers from speaking with any representative of the media regarding anything involving the Primary Election. Subsequently, a staffer from your office called both Parties' presiding judges at every Early Voting location to confirm the prohibition of free speech originally sent via the poll books.

This letter is to remind your office that the County Clerk is conducting this Primary Election under contract with the Harris County Republican Party. Your directive suppressing the free speech rights of election workers was never cleared or approved by me or the Republican Party.

Your directive infringes on the First Amendment rights of all election workers. Our Party vigorously defends the First Amendment rights of all citizens, including election workers in our Primary Election. The First Amendment protects the freedom of speech vital to our free society. However, your directive attempts to silence election workers from publicly reporting issues with your voting systems and seeks to prevent the media from accurately reporting on the election process and integrity. You have tried to justify your acts by calling poll workers "government employees." But as you well know, *they are independent contractors—not government employees.*

All voters deserve transparency from government. Therefore, you are instructed to retract your directive and let Republican primary election workers exercise their right to free speech. You are again instructed to retain all documents relating to this election, including emails, texts, phone records, and communications relating to the 2020 Harris County Republican primary election.

Finally, we plan to continue notifying relevant media outlets that Republican primary election workers are free to speak with them, as long as any such discussions do not interfere with a positive experience for the voters. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards,

Paul F. Simpson, County Chair
Harris County Republican Party
cc: County Judge Lina Hidalgo
County Commissioners Rodney Ellis, Adrian Garcia, Steve Radack, and Jack Cagle
Special Assistant County Attorney Douglas Ray

