

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 24, 2026

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711-2428

The Honorable Robert S. Howden
Secretary of State
Office of the Texas Secretary of State
Elections Division
P.O. Box 12060
Austin, TX 78711-2060

Dear Governor Abbott and Secretary Howden,

The United States Senate Committee on Rules and Administration has oversight jurisdiction over federal elections, including voter registration. I write with serious concern over recent disclosures that potentially hundreds of thousands of Texas voter registration applications were not properly processed by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and/or the Texas Secretary of State's office, leaving newly registered and updated voters at risk of being disenfranchised in the 2026 midterm elections.¹

All eligible Americans have a right to register to vote, cast their vote, and have their vote counted. The U.S. Constitution gives authority for elections to the states and to Congress. Pursuant to this authority, Congress has enacted a number of federal laws that protect voter registration, including the *National Voter Registration Act* (NVRA), the *Help America Vote Act*, and the *Voting Rights Act* to guarantee those rights are not infringed. The NVRA requires states to offer voter registration at the state's motor vehicle registration agency, and these issues raise questions about the state's compliance with the law. Understanding both the scope of this error, how it occurred, and how the state will remedy it to ensure that eligible voters are not disenfranchised is therefore an important subject for congressional oversight.

While the state has failed to produce an overall number, the Texas Association of County Election Officials is expecting a backlog of potentially hundreds of thousands of applications, noting that individual "[c]ounties have received anywhere from several hundred to tens of thousands of records to process."² These numbers are particularly high for populous counties, including but not limited to 45,000 in Bexar County,³ more than 40,000 in Collin County, and approximately 32,000 in Travis County which brought their overall backlog to 35,000 – a total of over 100,000 in those three counties alone.⁴ If numbers are similar in other large Texas counties, the total figure will be much higher.

¹ Natalia Contreras, *Unknown number of Texas voter registrations went unprocessed due to DPS error*, VoteBeat Texas (Sept. 22, 2026), <https://www.votebeat.org/texas/2026/09/22/voter-registration-applications-unprocessed-dps-error/>.

² Molly Hennessy-Fiske, *Texas voter-registration backlog could affect midterms*, The Washington Post (Sept. 24, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/09/24/texas-voter-registration-backlog-could-affect-midterms/>.

³ Associated Press, *State Error in Texas Creates Huge Backlog in Voter Registration Applications as Midterm Voting Nears*, U.S. News (Sept. 23, 2026), <https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2026-09-23/state-error-in-texas-creates-huge-backlog-in-voter-registration-applications-as-midterm-voting-nears>.

There are only seven business days before the state's voter registration deadline (October 5th). Texas counties are now facing a daunting backlog of potentially hundreds of thousands of applications as they are already busy with the work of preparing for the upcoming state and federal elections, which includes an election for the United States Senate. Local officials and potentially impacted voters have real reason to be concerned about the state's ability to work quickly enough to ensure that all eligible voters who registered can cast their ballot without obstacle. Further, the state and its localities have an obligation to contact affected voters to ensure they are aware of their right to cast a provisional ballot, which should be counted for the November 3rd election.

In addition, there are serious questions as to why this growing backlog of unprocessed voter registrations was not identified for so long. The state has also not yet provided public assurance that the issues that led to this backlog have been resolved, and whether new registrations are being processed appropriately. These issues have occurred amidst scrutiny of Texas' statewide voter registration system, known as TEAM, which has caused a host of issues during its "once-in-a-decade upgrade" that may relate to this huge registration backlog on election eve.⁵

The late timing of this announcement threatens the voting rights of more than a hundred thousand Texas voters on the heels of other intentional actions by the state that harm voting rights, such as mid-decade gerrymandered electoral maps and Senate Bill 1 that streamlined mass voter purges and restricted voting methods – including harsh limits on vote by mail.⁶ Voting rights advocates have also expressed concern that the state has failed to fund efficient election administration, greenlighted reductions in polling locations, and other additional obstacles and confusions for voters.⁷ Texas has also proactively cooperated with the Trump Administration's election interference agenda by handing over its voters' personal information and utilizing the flawed SAVE program, both actions which other states have successfully resisted on a bipartisan basis.⁸ Alternatively, if the state considered other commonsense reforms like online voter registration and same day registration, that could help voters avoid these issues.

To ensure that Congress can conduct its constitutional oversight role on this matter, please provide responses to the following questions no later than **Friday, October 2nd**.

⁴ Natalia Contreras, *Texas counties are receiving tens of thousands of unprocessed voter registration applications due to state error*, VoteBeat Texas (Sept. 23, 2026), <https://www.votebeat.org/texas/2026/09/23/dps-error-backlogged-voter-registration-applications-county-election-officials/>.

⁵ Natalia Contreras, *Texas lawmakers want fixes to statewide voter registration system ahead of midterm election*, VoteBeat Texas (June 24, 2026), <https://www.votebeat.org/texas/2026/06/24/team-voter-registration-system-civix-secretary-of-state/>.

⁶ *Senate Bill 1*, Texas Legislature Online, Enrolled September 7, 2021, <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/872/billtext/pdf/SB00001F.pdf>.

⁷ Cecilia Lenzen, *Tarrant County removes 92 polling sites ahead of November election*, The Texas Tribune (Sept. 1, 2026), <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/09/01/tarrant-county-removes-polling-sites/>.

⁸ Jen Fifield and Zach Despart, *A federal tool to check voter citizenship keeps making mistakes. It led to confusion in Texas*, The Texas Tribune (Feb. 13, 2026), <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/02/13/save-voter-citizenship-tool-mistakes-confusion/>.

1. What specific issues caused this failure to process voter registration applications? Who is conducting the investigation, and is there a coordinated review that involves both DPS and the Office of the Secretary of State?
2. How many eligible voters were impacted by this error? When will this be known with certainty and with what degree of confidence?
3. Has DPS and/or the Office of the Secretary of State resolved the underlying issues that led to the unprocessed applications, so that the backlog is not continuing to grow?
4. What support is the state providing to county officials as they address this backlog of applications? Is the state hiring additional personnel or authorizing overtime or supporting such actions on the local level?
5. Are all relevant Texas state agencies committed to processing all registrations that were filed on time but the process is delayed due to potential issues related to state agencies and not the eligible voter?
6. What outreach or education will be provided to voters who took steps to register on their rights to cast a ballot if they are not on the voter rolls by the November 3rd election? Relatedly, what education will be provided to election officials and volunteer poll workers who will be supporting these potential voters?
7. What safeguards will Texas state agencies put in place to ensure this error does not occur again?
8. Is the State of Texas complying with the 2021 settlement agreement in *Stringer v. Hughes* related to the state's failure to comply with the motor voter provisions of the NVRA?

Due to the size and timing of this voter registration failure, the eyes of voting rights advocates across America are upon Texas. I urge you to be transparent on this matter and ensure that all eligible voters in Texas who registered to vote can cast their ballot and make their voice heard.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla

United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Rules and Administration