Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2005

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is to call to your attention a serious problem at the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division that is threatening to undermine the civil rights of millions of American citizens. The Justice Department's recent approval of a Georgia voter-identification law that will likely discriminate against black voters is very disturbing. It is our understanding that a team of Justice Department lawyers and analysts recommended rejecting this law because it would reduce African American voters' access to the polls.

This is a matter of tremendous concern to the American people and certainly warrants review by our Committee. We request that the Committee obtain for review any internal Justice Department documents relating to the Georgia voter-identification law. In addition, we respectfully urge you to schedule a hearing on this matter as soon as possible.

The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division is responsible for enforcing all federal statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, sex, handicap, religion, and national origin. The Division's criminal prosecutions for racial and gender discrimination crimes have declined 40 percent over the past five years. The Division has historically played a prominent role in intervening in key discrimination cases. However, during the Bush Administration only three lawsuits have been filed over the last five years under the Voting Rights Act and none of them involve discrimination against blacks.

It has been reported that nearly 20 percent of the division's lawyers left the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in 2005. Career lawyers have made complaints that political appointees have cut them out of hiring and major policy decisions.

As the primary oversight Committee in the House, our Committee should play a vital role in ensuring that the U.S. Justice Department is doing everything possible to protect the rights of all citizens. Our goal should be to measure the impact that political appointees have in policy decisions in the Justice Department and perhaps other Cabinet agencies. Scheduling a hearing into these allegations would be a major step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Tom Lantos
Member of Congress

Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
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Barbara Lee
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