



July 19, 2023

The Honorable Commissioners J. Christian Adams,  
Rochelle Garza, Stephen Gilchrist, Gail Heriot,  
Mondaire Jones, Peter Kirsanow, Glenn Magpantay,  
and Victoria Nourse  
Mauro Albert Morales, Staff Director  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
1331 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 1150  
Washington, DC 20425

Dear Members of the Commission and Mr. Morales,

We are writing to request that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights withdraw its November 2021 appointment of Cleta Mitchell to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's Board of Advisors. As you are aware, Ms. Mitchell testified before the congressional January 6th Committee in 2022 that no one in the American public has a constitutional right to vote for President of the United States. She also continues to promote false claims of election fraud in the 2020 presidential election and to advocate for policies that would restrict many voters' access to the polls. These views are incompatible with the missions of both the Commission on Civil Rights and the Election Assistance Commission.

### **Background**

Under the Help America Vote Act of 2002, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) is charged with serving as a national clearinghouse and resource for the compilation of information on election administration, including "promot[ing] the effective administration of Federal elections." 52 U.S.C. § 20922. The EAC relies on a Board of Advisors to assist it in certain key efforts, including developing "program goals, long-term plans, mission statements, and related matters"; selection of the Election Assistance Commission's Executive Director; and reviewing

the Commission’s proposed voluntary voting system guidelines and proposed voluntary guidance to states. 52 U.S.C. §§ 20922, 20942.

Under 52 U.S.C. § 20944(a)(10), the Commission on Civil Rights appoints two members to the EAC’s Board of Advisors.

### **Cleta Mitchell**

As you know, Ms. Mitchell was deeply enmeshed in the disgraced former President Trump’s efforts to overturn the 2020 federal election. Her involvement, as detailed in the January 6th Committee’s final report, includes her participation in a January 2, 2021 phone call in which she and Trump made false statements in an attempt to convince the Georgia Secretary of State to “find” enough votes for Trump to (falsely) win the state.<sup>1</sup> A disciplinary complaint before the D.C. bar is already pending against her for this misconduct.<sup>2</sup> Ms. Mitchell also exerted pressure on Trump’s legal team to aggressively pursue baseless legal challenges to overturn the election.<sup>3</sup>

The January 6th Committee’s final release of documents adds new information. In her sworn deposition, Ms. Mitchell stated her personal view that the American public has *no right* to vote for the President of the United States, and that the public’s vote in the most important federal election is merely “advisory” as state legislatures make the actual choice. As she explained:

The Constitution of the United States grants plenary power to state legislatures to [choose] the electors of the state. . . . There’s nothing in the Constitution about allowing people, citizens to vote on electors. Now, that is something that legislatures have over time decided they want to do. But in my view, according to the Constitution, that’s an advisory role that happens because the legislature has created a mechanism to conduct the election.

. . . [T]he legislature can use -- choose to use what the people have decided. But that’s not in the Constitution. And so I think that that is one of the things that we hadn’t really -- as a country, we haven’t focused on that. But that is what the Constitution says. . . . The legislature has the authority to choose the electors. And they don’t have to ask anybody’s position, in my view. And that’s my position and I think that that’s what the Constitution says, and I think there’s ample authority to support that view.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, H. Rep. 117-663, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-J6-REPORT/>.

<sup>2</sup> The 65 Project, *Ethics Complaint Against Cleta Mitchell* (Mar. 7, 2022), <https://the65project.com/ethics-complaint-against-trump-attorney-cleta-mitchell/>.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Swan & Zachary Basu, *Exclusive Emails: Inside Trump’s Botched Georgia Fight*, Axios, Nov. 4, 2022, <https://www.axios.com/2022/11/04/trump-georgia-lawsuit-cleta-mitchell>.

<sup>4</sup> Cleta Mitchell Depo., May 18, 2022, at 20-21, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000083769/pdf/GPO-J6-TRANSCRIPT-CTRL0000083769.pdf>.

These views are unacceptable for a member of the EAC’s Board of Advisors, or for a designee of the Commission on Civil Rights. The fundamental mission of the Commission on Civil Rights is to investigate deprivations of “the right of citizens of the United States to vote and have votes counted.” 42 U.S.C. § 1975a(a)(1). And the Board of Advisors assists the EAC in its mission of “promot[ing] the effective administration of Federal elections.” 52 U.S.C. § 20922.

But in Ms. Mitchell’s view, “effective administration of Federal elections” is irrelevant because arguably the most important federal election—the vote for president—is merely “advisory.” And in her view, deprivations of “the right of citizens of the United States to vote” for president cannot possibly exist, because there *is* no right to vote in this critical election. In her view, the vote for which generations have fought and died is merely “advisory,” and the American public has less of a voice in presidential elections than in selecting the next winner of *American Idol*.

Since her appointment to the EAC Board, Ms. Mitchell has continued to promote false claims of election fraud, to undermine a legitimate, bipartisan program to secure elections, and to advocate for policies that would limit voter access and turnout. These activities, which operationalize her belief that Americans do not have a constitutional right to vote for president, further demonstrate her unsuitability for the position.

For example, Ms. Mitchell founded and continues to run the Conservative Partnership Institute’s “Election Integrity Network,”<sup>5</sup> which is funded in part by former President Trump’s super PAC.<sup>6</sup> During the 2022 campaign cycle, the Election Integrity Network relied on debunked claims of fraud to recruit and train partisan election deniers and conspiracy theorists to become poll watchers across swing states.<sup>7</sup> And through her organization, Ms. Mitchell continues to advance debunked claims of election fraud.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Tom Dreisbach, *What Leaked Audio Tells Us About Trump-Linked “Election-Integrity” Efforts*, NPR (Aug. 2, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3WUYxgo>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*; see also Cleta Mitchell’s “Election Integrity Network” and Its Attack on Voting Rights, Documented (May 8, 2023), <https://documented.net/investigations/conservative-partnership-institute>.

<sup>7</sup> Sam Levine, Republican Push to Recruit Election Deniers as Poll Workers Cause Alarm, *The Guardian* (June 30, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3qyzCn1>; Conservative Partnership Institute: The Trump-Aligned \$45M Institution Creating “America First” Political Infrastructure, Documented (Jul. 10, 2022 updated Dec., 12 2022) <https://documented.net/investigations/the-conservative-partnership-institutes-election-integrity-network-attack-on-voting-rights>.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., @EIwatchdogs, Twitter (Jul. 31, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3qA1ecM> (“The election was rigged. Trump won.”). At the same time, Ms. Mitchell is undermining the Electronic Registration Information Center, a legitimate, bipartisan program that allows states to share government data, keep voter rolls current, and prevent rare occurrences of voter fraud. Fringe conspiracy theories aimed at ERIC have led at least eight Republican-leaning states to withdraw, undermining the program’s utility and burdening voters, as these states are now returning to less reliable means of updating their voter rolls. Ms. Mitchell has repeatedly used her podcast to amplify these baseless theories and to encourage states to leave the program. Miles Park, *How the Far Right Is Making Voter Fraud Easier*, National Public Radio (June 4, 2023 8:00 AM ET) <https://bit.ly/3qBK8Kh>; Miles Park, *The Fair Right’s Growing Influence and 4 Other Takeaways from NPR’s ERIC Investigation*, NPR, <https://bit.ly/43Q1S2B>.

Furthermore, while on the EAC advisory board, Ms. Mitchell has promoted efforts to curtail mail-in voting and restrict voting access.<sup>9</sup> In a recent presentation to Republican National Committee donors, Ms. Mitchell encouraged Republicans to limit voters' access to the polls. Ms. Mitchell took particular interest in curbing the youth vote by advocating for restrictions on campus and mail-in voting in order to "level the playing field" for Republicans in 2024.<sup>10</sup>

These activities, which seek to prevent Americans from exercising the constitutional right to vote, follow directly from her view that we do not *have* a constitutional right to vote.

### **Mitchell's appointment should be revoked**

We recognize that there are differing views on precisely which actions constitute a deprivation of the right to vote. But Ms. Mitchell does not even believe that there *exists* a right to vote.

The Commission on Civil Rights must uphold its own mission and integrity. The USCCR's stated mission is to "enhance [the] enforcement of federal civil rights laws."<sup>11</sup> Here, the Commission has appointed to a key federal advisory board an individual whose sworn views, stated under oath, are repugnant to those of the Commission itself, the EAC advisory board to which the Commission appointed her, and the very concept of democracy and fair elections. They are incompatible with her continued service on the EAC's Board of Advisors or representation, even indirectly, of the Commission. In that respect, they are at *least* as serious as, e.g., a violation of the Office of Government Ethics' guidelines for federal advisory committee members.

Other federal agencies have recognized the need to replace advisory committee members when they can no longer serve in the capacity for which they were appointed. For example, the U.S. Department of Transportation's order on committees subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act specifies that "[a] member's status as a representative of a designated party or interest terminates if the member's status or relationship with the designated party or interest materially changes after appointment," unless four specific criteria (including that "the member's continued participation is deemed essential for the fulfillment of the committee's mission") are satisfied.<sup>12</sup> Here, Ms. Mitchell's ability to represent the interest for which she was appointed is irrevocably compromised.

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Stone, Alarm After Lawyer Who Aided Trump's 2020 Election Lie Attacks Campus Voting, *The Guardian* (May 8, 2023), <https://bit.ly/3NmnC0P>; see also In the Documents: Cleta Mitchell's Emails Criticizing Increased Use of Absentee Voting, Am. Oversight, <https://bit.ly/43xEV5>.

<sup>10</sup> Josh Dawsey & Amy Gardner, *Top GOP lawyer decries ease of campus voting in private pitch to RNC*, *Wash. Post* (Apr. 20, 2023), <https://bit.ly/3N0HYLp>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Comm'n on C. R., *Our Mission*, available at <https://www.usccr.gov/about/mission>; see also 42 U.S.C. § 1975a.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Dep't of Transportation, Committee Management Policy and Procedures (July 6, 2022), DOT 1120.3D, § 10(f)(1), at 13, available at [bit.ly/3kcgUhv](https://bit.ly/3kcgUhv). For committee members who are designated as Special Government Employees, even more stringent requirements would apply. See *id.* § 10(f)(2).

We urge you to revoke Ms. Mitchell's appointment and to replace her, for the balance of her term, with a candidate who acknowledges both that the American people have the right to vote for President of the United States and that this right is strengthened when it is freely available to all eligible voters.

Sincerely,

Ron Fein, Legal Director  
John Bonifaz, President  
Ben Clements, Chairman and Senior Legal Advisor  
Alexandra Flores-QUILTY, Campaign Director  
Courtney Hostetler, Senior Counsel  
Free Speech For People  
1320 Centre St. #405  
Newton, Massachusetts 02459  
(617) 244-0234

Brianna Cea, Executive Director and Founder  
Brendan Cushing, Managing Director  
Generation Vote  
Church Street Station  
PO Box 3224  
New York, New York 10008