

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS  
EASTERN DIVISION**

JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.; ILLINOIS  
FAMILY ACTION; BREAKTHROUGH  
IDEAS; and CAROL J. DAVIS,

Plaintiffs,

Civil Action No. \_\_\_\_\_

v.

THE ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF  
ELECTIONS; and BERNADETTE  
MATTHEWS, in her capacity as the  
Executive Director of the Illinois State Board  
of Elections,

Defendants.

**COMPLAINT**

Plaintiffs Judicial Watch, Inc., Illinois Family Action, Breakthrough Ideas, and Carol J. Davis (“Plaintiffs”) file this complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief against the Illinois State Board of Elections and its Executive Director Bernadette Matthews, in her official capacity (“Defendants”).

1. Plaintiffs seek declaratory and injunctive relief to compel Defendants to comply with their voter list maintenance obligations under Section 8 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (“NVRA” or “Act”), 52 U.S.C. § 20507. Plaintiffs also seek reasonable attorneys’ fees, litigation expenses, and costs, which are available to prevailing parties under the Act. *Id.*, § 20510(c).

## **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

2. This Court has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331, as this action arises under the laws of the United States, and in particular under 52 U.S.C. §§ 20507 and 20510(b).

3. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because a defendant resides in this district and all defendants reside in Illinois, and because a substantial part of the events and omissions giving rise to the claims herein occurred in this district.

## **PARTIES**

4. Plaintiff Judicial Watch, Inc. (“Judicial Watch”) is a not-for-profit, educational organization incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia and headquartered at 425 Third Street SW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20024.

5. Plaintiff Illinois Family Action is a non-profit political advocacy and lobbying organization incorporated under the laws of Illinois and headquartered in Tinley Park, Illinois.

6. Plaintiff Breakthrough Ideas is a non-profit advocacy organization incorporated under the laws of Illinois and headquartered in Wheaton, Illinois.

7. Plaintiff Carol J. Davis is a resident and lawfully registered voter in DuPage County, Illinois.

8. Defendant Illinois State Board of Elections (the “State Board”) is an independent state agency created under the laws of the State of Illinois. Defendant State Board is responsible for supervising the administration of registration and election laws throughout the State.

9. Defendant Bernadette Matthews is the Executive Director of the Illinois State Board of Elections and the Chief State Election Official of the State of Illinois. She is sued in her official capacity.

## STATUTORY BACKGROUND

10. Section 8 of the NVRA provides that “each State shall ... conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove ... from the official lists of eligible voters” the names of voters who have become ineligible by reason of death or a change of residence. 52 U.S.C. § 20507(a)(4).

11. With respect to voters who have changed residence, Section 8 provides that no registration may be cancelled on that ground unless the registrant either (1) confirms this fact in writing, or (2) fails to timely respond to an address-confirmation notice described by the statute (the “Confirmation Notice”). 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(1).

12. A Confirmation Notice must incorporate a “postage prepaid and pre-addressed return card, sent by forwardable mail,” asking the registrant to confirm his or her residence address. *Id.* at (d)(2). If a registrant fails to respond to such a Confirmation Notice, and then fails to vote (or contact the registrar) during a statutory waiting period extending from the date of the notice through the next two general federal elections, the registration is cancelled. *Id.* at (d)(1)(B). These cancellations are mandatory under both federal and state law. *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Inst.*, 138 S. Ct. 1833, 1842 (2018) (“federal law makes this removal mandatory”); 26 Ill. Adm. Code 216.50(b) (registration “of an inactive voter who has not voted in two consecutive general federal elections shall be canceled at the completion of procedures set forth in Section 8(d)”).

13. Federal and state regulations refer to voter registrations as “inactive” when a registrant has failed to respond to a Confirmation Notice and the statutory waiting period has commenced but has not yet concluded. 11 C.F.R. § 9428.7; 26 Ill. Adm. Code 216.20.

14. A voter with an inactive registration may still vote on election day. 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(2)(A). Accordingly, inactive voters are still registered voters.

15. In June of each odd-numbered year, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (“EAC”) is required by law to report to Congress its findings relating to state voter registration practices. 52 U.S.C. § 20508(a)(3).

16. Federal regulations require states to provide various kinds of NVRA-related data to the EAC for use in its biennial report, specifically including:

- a. The “total number of registered voters statewide” in the most recent election, “including both ‘active’ and ‘inactive’ voters.” 11 C.F.R. § 9428.7(b)(2).
- b. The “total number of registrants statewide that were considered ‘inactive’” in the most recent election. *Id.* § 9428.7(b)(4).
- c. The “total number of registrations statewide that were, for whatever reason, deleted from the registration list” between the last two elections. *Id.* § 9428.7(b)(5).
- d. The “statewide number” of Confirmation Notices mailed between the last two elections, and “the statewide number of responses received” to them. *Id.* § 9428.7(b)(8).

17. Section 8(i) of the NVRA grants the public the right to request information concerning voter list maintenance. It provides: “Each State shall maintain for at least 2 years and shall make available for public inspection” and copying “all records concerning the implementation of programs and activities conducted for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.” 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i).

18. Though not purporting to be an exhaustive list, Section 8(i)(2) provides specific examples of responsive records: “The records maintained . . . shall include lists of the names and addresses of all persons to whom notices described in subsection (d)(2) are sent, and information

concerning whether or not each such person has responded to the notice as of the date that inspection of the records is made.” 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i)(2).

19. Under Illinois law, Defendant State Board has “general supervision over the administration of the registration and election laws throughout the State.” 10 ILCS 5/1A-1. Its powers and duties include: “(2) Disseminat[ing] information to and consult[ing] with election authorities concerning the conduct of elections and registration ...”; “(6) Requir[ing] such statistical reports regarding the conduct of elections and registration from election authorities as may be deemed necessary”; “(7) Review[ing] and inspect[ing] procedures and records relating to conduct of elections and registration as may be deemed necessary, and [] report[ing] violations of election laws ...”; “(8) Recommend[ing] ... legislation to improve the administration of elections and registration”; “(9) Adopt[ing], amend[ing] or rescind[ing] rules and regulations in the performance of its duties ...”; and “(12) Supervis[ing] the administration of the registration and election laws throughout the State.” 10 ILCS 5/1A-8. Illinois law further provides that the State Board may “by regulation delegate any of its duties or functions under this Article,” although “final determinations and orders under this Article shall be issued only by the Board.” *Id.*

20. Illinois law provides that the “centralized statewide voter registration list required by ... the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (“HAVA”) shall be created and maintained” by Defendant State Board. 10 ILCS 5/1A-25.

21. HAVA requires the centralized statewide voter registration list to be updated to remove ineligible registrants from the list “in accordance with the provisions of the National Voter Registration Act,” including “subsections (a)(4), (c)(2), (d), and (e) of section 8 of such Act.” 52 U.S.C. § 21083(a)(2)(A)(i).

22. The NVRA provides that “[e]ach State shall designate a State officer or employee as the chief State election official to be responsible for coordination of State responsibilities under this chapter.” 52 U.S.C. § 20509. Illinois law designates the Executive Director of the State Board as the Chief State Election Official. 26 Ill. Adm. Code § 216.100(b). Illinois law further provides that Executive Director “may issue such opinions or directions as he or she deems necessary to insure that” the NVRA and provisions of the Illinois Administrative Code dealing with voter registration “are implemented uniformly throughout Illinois.” *Id.* § 216.100(c).

23. The NVRA affords a private right of action to any “person who is aggrieved by a violation” of the Act. 52 U.S.C. § 20510(b). Ordinarily, a private litigant is required to send notice of a violation to the chief State election official 90 days prior to commencing a lawsuit. *Id.* § 20510(b)(1), (2). However, notice of only 20 days is required “if the violation occurred within 120 days before the date of an election for Federal office,” and no notice is required if a “violation occurred within 30 days before the date of an election for Federal office.” *Id.* § 20510(b)(2), (3).

## FACTS

### *The Data from the Latest EAC Report*

24. On June 29, 2023, the EAC published its biennial, NVRA-related report, entitled ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AND VOTING SURVEY 2022 COMPREHENSIVE REPORT, A REPORT FROM THE U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION TO THE 118TH CONGRESS, available at [https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/2022\\_EAVS\\_Report\\_508c.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/2022_EAVS_Report_508c.pdf).

25. Along with this report, the EAC published the responses it received to a voter registration survey it sent to the states. The survey is available at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys> under the heading for 2022, at a link entitled “2022 Election Administration and Voting Survey Instrument.” States, in consultation with their own

county and local officials, certified their answers to this voting survey directly to the EAC.

26. States' responses to EAC surveys are compiled in datasets available online in several different software formats, at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>. Responses to the most recent survey were published on June 29, 2023. They are available online under the heading for 2022 as "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0."<sup>1</sup>

27. The largest number of outdated registrations subject to removal under the NVRA almost always belong to those who have changed residence. For this reason, the largest number of removals under the NVRA are usually made pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B), for failing to respond to a Confirmation Notice and failing to vote in two consecutive general federal elections.

28. The data Illinois certified to the EAC shows that 11 counties removed zero voter registrations from November 2020 to November 2022 pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B). The 11 counties are Christian County, Clark County, DeKalb County, Johnson County, Lee County, Macon County, Marshall County, Pike County, Stark County, Union County, and Washington County.

29. The data Illinois certified to the EAC showed that 12 other counties removed 15 or fewer voter registrations from November 2020 to November 2022 pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B). These 12 counties are Bureau County (1 removal), Edwards County (12), Franklin County (11), Hamilton County (5), Henry County (10), Lake County (8), Marion County (12), Ogle County (11), Piatt County (15), Pulaski County (6), Putnam County (5), and Randolph County (4).

30. In all, these 23 counties reported a combined total of 980,089 voter registrations as of November 2022. Yet they reported removing a combined total of 100 registrations in the last

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<sup>1</sup> An updated version of the initial responses ("EAVS Datasets Version 1.1") was published on the same webpage on December 18, 2023, to account for new information submitted by Delaware, Hawaii, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The Illinois data was unchanged.

two-year reporting period pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B) because the registrants failed to respond to a Confirmation Notice and failed to vote in the next two general federal elections.

31. In Plaintiffs' experience, based on years of enforcing the NVRA, these are absurdly small numbers of removals under Section 8(d)(1)(B). There is no possible way these counties can be conducting a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible because of a change of residence while removing so few registrations under Section 8(d)(1)(B).

32. According to the Census Bureau, 11.8% of Illinois residents are not living at the same residence address as they were one year ago.

33. According to the Census Bureau, about 344,000 Illinois residents moved out of state in 2022 (the most recent year for which such data is available).

34. If the identified counties were complying with Section 8(d)(1)(B) of the NVRA, the number of registrations they remove pursuant to that provision in any two-year period should be much higher. In particular, that number should never be zero, in any jurisdiction.

35. As a point of comparison, Stephenson County, Illinois, with a much smaller total of 28,385 voter registrations in November 2022, removed 5,214 registrations pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B) in the last two-year reporting period.

36. As a point of comparison, tiny Pope County, Illinois, with 2,772 voter registrations, removed 175 registrations pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B) in the last two-year reporting period. That is still more voter registrations than were removed under that provision in all 23 identified counties *combined*.

37. The fact that Illinois' own data shows that more than one fifth of its counties removed few or no registrations under Section 8(d)(1)(B) for failing to respond to a Confirmation



Notice and failing to vote in the next two general federal elections establishes a statewide failure to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence.

38. Illinois also informed the EAC that another 34 jurisdictions simply failed to report any data whatsoever regarding Section 8(d)(1)(B) removals in the most recent reporting period, indicating instead “Data not available.” These counties are Adams County, Alexander County, Brown County, Cass County, Chicago City, Clay County, Clinton County, Cook County, Crawford County, Douglas County, East St. Louis City, Fayette County, Gallatin County, Greene County, Grundy County, Jefferson County, Kane County, Kankakee County, Knox County, La Salle County, Logan County, Mason County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Perry County, Richland County, Scott County, Vermilion County, Warren County, White County, Winnebago County, and Woodford County.

39. Nineteen of these 34 counties also failed to report any data regarding registrations removed on account of the death of the registered voter. These 19 counties are Alexander County, Clay County, Clinton County, Cook County, Fayette County, Gallatin County, Grundy County, Knox County, Logan County, McDonough County, Mason County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Chicago City, Perry County, Richland County, Scott County, Warren County, and Winnebago County.

40. In Plaintiffs’ experience, jurisdictions do not ignore their reporting obligations to the EAC where the data is favorable to them. Rather, they often fail to report data that suggests non-compliance with the NVRA.

41. The fact that Illinois admitted to the EAC that almost one third of its counties and cities did not report data concerning removals under Section 8(d)(1)(B) for failing to respond to a

Confirmation Notice and failing to vote in the next two general federal elections establishes a statewide failure to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence.

42. The sending of Confirmation Notices is a necessary first step under Section 8(d)(1)(B) to removing the outdated registrations of voters who changed address. The failure to respond to this notice makes the registration inactive and starts the NVRA's statutory "clock," after which the registration is cancelled.

43. Illinois informed the EAC that 29 of its counties failed to report any data regarding the number of Confirmation Notices sent during the period from November 2020 to November 2022, indicating instead "Data not available." These counties are Alexander County, Boone County, Brown County, Champaign County, Clay County, Clinton County, DeKalb County, Fayette County, Franklin County, Gallatin County, Greene County, Grundy County, Henry County, Johnson County, Kankakee County, Logan County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Montgomery County, Ogle County, Richland County, Schuyler County, Scott County, Union County, Warren County, Wayne County, Williamson County, and Winnebago County.

44. The fact that Illinois admitted to the EAC that more than one fourth of its counties did not report data concerning the number of Confirmation Notices mailed establishes a statewide failure to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence.

45. If a registrant does not respond to a Confirmation Notice, the registrant is marked inactive. Accordingly, the number of inactive registrations is a critical indicator of whether Confirmation Notices are being sent and followed up and, in general, whether a jurisdiction is

complying with the NVRA.

46. Illinois informed the EAC that 22 jurisdictions did not report any data regarding the number of inactive registrations on their rolls during the relevant period from November 2020 to November 2022, reporting instead “Data not available.” These counties are Adams County, Alexander County, Brown County, Clay County, DeKalb County, Fayette County, Grundy County, Johnson County, Knox County, LaSalle County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Piatt County, Pike County, Randolph County, Rockford City, Shelby County, Stark County, Union County, and Warren County.

47. The fact that Illinois admitted to the EAC that one fifth of its jurisdictions did not report data regarding the number of inactive registrations establishes a statewide failure to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence.

48. Fifty-two of 108 Illinois jurisdictions failed to report any data to the EAC in one or more of the crucial data categories identified above, *viz.*, relevant statutory removals, Confirmation Notices, or inactive registrations. This shows a statewide failure to comply with reporting obligations embodied in federal regulations, including 11 C.F.R. § 9428.7.

49. In all, 66 of Illinois’ 108 jurisdictions—or 60% of them—either reported fewer than 15 Section 8(d)(1)(B) removals, or failed to report one of the crucial data categories (relevant statutory removals, Confirmation Notices, or inactive registrations) identified above.

50. These 66 jurisdictions contain a total of 5.8 million registered voters. These amount to about 66% of Illinois’ reported 8.8 million voter registrations.

51. The foregoing facts establish a statewide failure to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by

reason of a change of residence, and establish a statewide failure to enforce the NVRA, for which Defendant State Board and Defendant Matthews are liable.

*Facts Arising from Correspondence*

52. On August 4, 2023, Plaintiff Judicial Watch wrote a letter to Defendant Matthews discussing the data Illinois had reported to the EAC. It asked that she confirm whether the data concerning low removals in 23 counties was accurate, and, if it was not accurate, to supply correct data. It also asked her to supply the missing county or city-level data about Section 8(d)(1)(B) removals, Confirmation Notices, and inactive registrations. The letter did not purport to be a pre-suit notice of violation or to start a notice period described in 52 U.S.C. § 20510, but was styled as an “Inquiry and request for public records.” This letter is attached hereto as Exhibit 1.

53. Judicial Watch’s August 4, 2023 letter also requested six categories of public records pursuant to Section 8(i) of the NVRA. The first request, quoting the language of Section 8(i)(2), sought a list “of the names and addresses of all persons to whom notices described in 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(2) [*i.e.*, Confirmation Notices] were sent, and information concerning whether or not each such person responded to the notice.”

54. On September 1, 2023, counsel for Defendant Matthews responded by letter. This letter is attached hereto as Exhibit 2.

55. Defendants’ September 1, 2023 letter did not confirm whether the data concerning low removals in 23 counties was accurate, or supply corrected data. Instead, the letter stated that Defendant State Board was not obligated to respond to Judicial Watch’s inquiries.

56. Defendants’ September 1, 2023 letter admitted that Defendant State Board “does not have access to local election authorities’ list maintenance records.” The letter added that “[a]ny request for more information regarding specific jurisdictions’ list maintenance activities and/or

EAVS survey statistics should be made [] directly to the local election authority.”

57. Defendants’ September 1, 2023 letter further stated that “local election authorities, not SBE, maintain lists of all voters to whom a forwardable confirmation of address notice has been sent.”

58. Defendants’ September 1, 2023 letter, and a subsequent communication a few days later, produced public records in response to Judicial Watch’s requests. However, in response to Judicial Watch’s request no. 1, for records concerning the mailing and disposition of Confirmation Notices—which are specifically identified as responsive records by Section 8(i)(2) of the NVRA—the letter admitted, “SBE does not possess documents responsive to this request, as explained above.”

59. The NVRA and related federal regulations require the State of Illinois, and not its counties, cities, or local authorities, to maintain and make available statewide records of Confirmation Notices sent and of responses to them. 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i) (“Each State shall ...”); 11 C.F.R. § 9428.7(a), (b)(8) (chief state election official “shall” report the “statewide number” of Confirmation Notices and “the statewide number of responses”).

60. Defendants cannot conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence, unless Defendants have access to local election authorities’ list maintenance records, and, in particular, access to their data and statistics concerning (1) removals of registrations under Section 8(d)(1)(B), (2) the mailing and disposition of Confirmation Notices, (3) the number of inactive registrations on their voter rolls, and (4) their responses to the EAC’s biennial survey.

61. Defendant Matthews cannot fulfill her statutory duty as Illinois’ Chief State Election Official to be responsible for the coordination of State responsibilities under the NVRA,

unless she has access to local election authorities' list maintenance records, and, in particular, access to their data and statistics concerning (1) removals of registrations under Section 8(d)(1)(B), (2) the mailing and disposition of Confirmation Notices, (3) the number of inactive registrations on their voter rolls, and (4) their responses to the EAC's biennial survey.

62. The NVRA supersedes and preempts any Illinois law or practice that
  - a. restricts Defendants' access to local election authorities' list maintenance records, including access to data regarding the cancellation of registrations, the mailing of and responses to Confirmation Notices, and the number of inactive registrations;
  - b. diminishes the responsibility of the Chief State Election Official to coordinate State responsibilities under the NVRA;
  - c. assigns ultimate responsibility for conducting NVRA-mandated list maintenance to city or county officials; or
  - d. assigns ultimate responsibility for performing NVRA-mandated public record obligations to county, city, or local officials.

63. Requiring a party who is or may be aggrieved by a violation of the list maintenance provisions of the NVRA to individually contact 108 Illinois counties and cities to set forth its concerns, make inquiries, or serve statutory notice-of-violation letters, and to follow up as may be necessary in each of those jurisdictions—including, perhaps, by means of multiple lawsuits—makes NVRA enforcement exponentially harder in Illinois, and effectively allows statewide officials at the State Board, including the designated Chief State Election Official, to duck responsibilities assigned by federal law.

64. Requiring a party who seeks a specific set of public records guaranteed by Section

8(i) of the NVRA to individually contact 108 Illinois counties and cities to make the same requests, and then to follow up in each of those jurisdictions depending on their responses, makes using the NVRA public records provision exponentially harder in Illinois. It also makes the process much longer, in that a full statewide response will always depend on the slowest of 108 jurisdictions.

65. The list maintenance provisions of the NVRA, which help ensure that voters will neither be wrongly removed from the rolls nor have their votes nullified by ineligible voters, promote the fundamental right to vote, and enhance voter participation.

66. The public records provisions of the NVRA embody Congress' conviction that the right of Americans who are eligible to vote must not be sacrificed to administrative chicanery, oversights, or inefficiencies. Making these provisions harder to enforce contravenes the will of Congress and injures the public.

67. Illinois has previously attempted to thwart the purposes of the NVRA. In *Ill. Conservative Union v. Illinois*, 2021 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 102543 (N.D. Ill. June 1, 2021), the plaintiffs challenged the State's requirement that restricted electronic access to the centralized statewide voter registration list to political committees and governmental bodies. The Illinois law effectively forced members of the public to view Illinois' millions of voter registration files one at a time on a computer screen at the Springfield office of the State Board during business hours, without being able to copy, query, or otherwise obtain the data electronically. The plaintiffs were held to have stated a claim that Illinois law frustrated the NVRA's purpose and was superseded by federal law. *Id.* at \*19-20.

68. Defendants' September 1, 2023 letter further stated that "Electronic Registration Information Center ('ERIC') participation is the cornerstone of Illinois' voter list maintenance scheme."

69. ERIC is a non-profit that purports to assist both with encouraging new voter registrations and identifying outdated ones, including by comparing registrations among its member states.

70. Participation as a member of ERIC does not ensure compliance with the NVRA.

71. ERIC recently has been plagued by accusations of partisanship and ineffectiveness and has been rapidly losing member states.

72. ERIC's membership currently includes 24 states and D.C., which together contain only 40% of the total U.S. population.

73. According to the Census Bureau, the greatest number of Illinoisians who left the state in 2022 moved to (in order) Florida, Indiana, Wisconsin, Texas, and California. Of these, only Wisconsin is currently a member of ERIC.

74. Defendants' September 1, 2023 letter admitted that any data obtained "in cooperation with ERIC" by cross-referencing various databases is merely shared with local election authorities. It is left to those authorities to "confirm any matches and make the required updates to the applicable voter records."

75. In order to comply with the NVRA, election officials must not merely identify potentially ineligible registrants, they must actually remove them from the voter rolls.

76. As demonstrated by the 23 Illinois counties who reported removing from zero to 15 voters from the rolls pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B), Illinois election officials are manifestly failing to remove ineligible residents from the voter rolls.

77. On November 15, 2023, Plaintiffs sent a letter to Defendant Matthews in her capacity as Illinois' chief State election official, notifying her of violations of the NVRA and threatening this lawsuit unless those violations were cured within 90 days. The letter expressly



stated that it constituted the pre-suit notice prescribed by 52 U.S.C. § 20510. It is attached hereto as Exhibit 3 (the “Notice Letter”).

78. The Notice Letter repeated the allegations contained in Judicial Watch’s August 4, 2023 letter.

79. The Notice Letter also observed that, “[c]omparing the data your state reported to the EAC regarding the total registration numbers for each county to the U.S. Census Bureau’s most recent five-year estimates of the numbers of resident citizens over the age of eighteen suggests that 15 Illinois jurisdictions have more voter registrations than citizens of voting age.” Such high registration rates suggest a statewide failure to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence.

80. The Notice Letter also alleged a violation of Section 8(i), based on Defendants’ admission that they did not have the records described in Section 8(i)(2), which the NVRA expressly requires states to maintain and provide.

81. In subsequent communications responding to the Notice Letter, Defendants have never confirmed whether the data concerning low removals in 23 counties was accurate, have never supplied the corrected data, and have never produced records concerning Confirmation Notices in response to request no. 1. Instead, these communications made legal arguments, and sought to favorably recharacterize the foregoing facts, asserting, for example, that only a “handful” of Illinois jurisdictions failed to remove registrations or report data.

***The Interests of the Plaintiffs***

82. Plaintiff Judicial Watch’s mission is to promote transparency, integrity, and accountability in government and fidelity to the rule of law. The organization, which has been in

existence since 1994, fulfills its mission through public records requests and litigation, among other means.

83. Judicial Watch is supported in its mission by hundreds of thousands of individuals across the nation. An individual becomes a member of Judicial Watch by making a financial contribution, in any amount, to the organization. Members' financial contributions are by far the single most important source of income to Judicial Watch and provide the means by which the organization finances its activities in support of its mission. Judicial Watch in turn represents the interests of its members.

84. Over the past several years, Judicial Watch's members and Plaintiff Carol J. Davis have become increasingly concerned about the state of the nation's voter registration rolls, including whether state and local officials are complying with the NVRA's voter list maintenance obligations. They are concerned that failing to comply with the NVRA's voter list maintenance obligations impairs the integrity of elections by increasing the opportunity for ineligible voters or voters intent on fraud to cast ballots.

85. Defendants' failure to comply with their NVRA voter list maintenance obligations burdens the federal and state constitutional rights to vote of all individual members of Judicial Watch who are lawfully registered to vote in Illinois, and of Carol J. Davis, by undermining their confidence in the integrity of the electoral process, discouraging their participation in the democratic process, and instilling in them the fear that their legitimate votes will be nullified or diluted.

86. Protecting the voting rights of Judicial Watch members who are lawfully registered to vote in Illinois is germane to Judicial Watch's mission. It also is well within the scope of the reasons why members of Judicial Watch join the organization and support its mission.

87. Because the relief sought herein will inure to the benefit of Judicial Watch members who are lawfully registered to vote in Illinois, neither the claims asserted nor the relief requested requires the participation of Judicial Watch's individual members.

88. In response to the concerns of its members, Judicial Watch commenced a nationwide program to monitor state and local election officials' compliance with their NVRA list maintenance obligations. As part of this program, Judicial Watch utilizes public records laws to request and receive records and data from jurisdictions across the nation about their voter list maintenance efforts. It then analyzes these records and data and publishes the results of its findings to the jurisdictions, to its members, and to the general public.

89. Judicial Watch's concerns with Illinois' list maintenance practices led it to send the August 2023 correspondence described in this complaint and to request documents relating to the state's list maintenance practices, and to analyze the State's responses. Judicial Watch's concerns also caused it to send its Notice Letter threatening a lawsuit under Sections 8(a)(4) and (i) of the NVRA to Defendant Matthews, and to research and analyze her response. Judicial Watch's concerns also led it to conduct analyses of Illinois' registration rates, removal rates, Confirmation Notice statistics, and inactive rates.

90. Judicial Watch has expended substantial resources, including staff time, investigating Defendants' failure to comply with their NVRA voter list maintenance obligations, communicating with Illinois officials and concerned members about Defendants' failure, and researching statements made by Defendants in their correspondence.

91. The resources expended by Judicial Watch to investigate, address, research, and counteract Defendants' failure to comply with their NVRA voter list maintenance obligations are

distinct from and above and beyond Judicial Watch's regular, programmatic efforts to monitor state and local election officials' NVRA compliance.

92. Were it not for Defendants' failure to comply with their NVRA voter list maintenance obligations, Judicial Watch would have expended these same resources on its regular, programmatic activities or would not have expended them at all. Instead, it diverted its resources to counteract Defendants' noncompliance and to protect members' rights.

93. Plaintiff Illinois Family Action is a 501(c)(4), non-profit political advocacy and lobbying organization and is dedicated to preserving and advancing the interests of family, faith, and freedom in the political arena. It is the non-profit and tax-exempt legislative action arm of the Illinois Family Institute. Illinois Family Action publicly endorses and supports candidates who support its core principles.

94. Illinois Family Action relies on Illinois' voter rolls to identify in-state voters and to contact them and encourage them to assist the candidates it supports by volunteering, organizing, contributing, and voting. Its ability to contact Illinois voters is made more difficult because the voter rolls contain many outdated and ineligible registrations.

95. Plaintiff Breakthrough Ideas is a 501(c)(4) policy advocacy and education network that advances the causes of peace, prosperity, and freedom by highlighting the virtue of taxpayer-centric and liberty-focused policies and how they benefit all community members.

96. Breakthrough Ideas relies on Illinois' voter rolls to contact Illinois voters to conduct its get-out-the-vote efforts and its advocacy and education missions. Its ability to contact Illinois voters is made more difficult because the voter rolls contain many outdated and ineligible registrations.

97. Defendants' failure to timely remove ineligible registrants from Illinois' voter rolls causes Illinois Family Action to waste significant time, effort, and money trying to contact voters listed on the rolls who no longer live at the registered address.

98. Plaintiffs Judicial Watch, Illinois, Family Action, and Carol J. Davis were denied access to a category of public records concerning Illinois' "programs and activities conducted for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters" that Plaintiffs were entitled to access under the NVRA.

### COUNT I

#### **(Violation of Section 8(a)(4) of the NVRA, 52 U.S.C. § 20507(a)(4))**

99. Plaintiffs reallege all preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

100. Plaintiffs Judicial Watch, Illinois Family Action, Breakthrough Ideas, and Carol J. Davis are persons aggrieved by a violation of the NVRA, as set forth in 52 U.S.C. § 20510(b).

101. Defendants have failed to fulfill their obligations under Section 8(a)(4) of the NVRA to conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to cancel the registrations of Illinois voters who have become ineligible by reason of a change of residence.

102. Defendant Matthews has failed in her duty as Illinois' chief State election official to coordinate State responsibilities under the NVRA.

103. Plaintiffs have suffered and will continue to suffer irreparable injury as a direct result of Defendants' failure to fulfill their obligations under the NVRA.

104. Plaintiffs have no adequate remedy at law.

### COUNT II

#### **(Violation of Section 8(i) of the NVRA, 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i))**

105. Plaintiffs reallege all preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

106. Defendants have failed to fulfill their obligations under Section 8(i) of the NVRA to make available to Plaintiffs “all records concerning the implementation of programs and activities conducted for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.”

107. Plaintiffs Judicial Watch, Illinois Family Action, and Carol J. Davis have suffered, and will continue to suffer, irreparable injury as a direct result of Defendants’ failure to fulfill their obligations under Section 8(i) of the NVRA.

108. Plaintiffs have no adequate remedy at law.

**PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs pray for entry of a judgment:

- a. Declaring Defendants to be in violation of Section 8(a)(4) of the NVRA;
- b. Permanently enjoining Defendants from violating Section 8(a)(4) of the NVRA;
- c. Ordering Defendants to develop and implement a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove the registrations of ineligible registrants from the voter rolls in Illinois;
- d. Declaring that the NVRA supersedes and preempts any contrary Illinois law or practice;
- e. Declaring that Defendants have violated Section 8(i) of the NVRA by refusing to allow Plaintiffs to inspect and copy the requested records;
- f. Permanently enjoining Defendants from refusing to allow Plaintiffs to inspect and copy the requested records;
- g. Ordering Defendants to pay Plaintiffs’ reasonable attorney’s fees, including litigation expenses and costs; and

h. Awarding Plaintiffs such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

March 5, 2024

s/ Christine Svenson  
Christine Svenson, Esq.  
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\* *Application for admission pro hac vice forthcoming*



August 4, 2023

*VIA USPS CERTIFIED MAIL AND EMAIL*

Ms. Bernadette Matthews  
Executive Director, Illinois State Board of Elections  
69 W. Washington Street  
Suite LL08  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

**Re: Inquiry and request for public records**

Dear Ms. Matthews:

I write on behalf of Judicial Watch, Inc., a non-partisan educational foundation that promotes transparency, accountability and integrity in government, politics and law. We wish to inquire about certain data you recently provided to the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) regarding your state's implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA).<sup>1</sup> This letter also serves as a public records request seeking records related to the accuracy of the voter registration list, which you are obligated to provide under Section 8(i) of the NVRA.<sup>2</sup> We write to you as the chief State election official responsible for coordinating state compliance with the NVRA.<sup>3</sup>

**Background**

As you are no doubt aware, the NVRA was intended both to "increase the number of eligible citizens who register" and "to protect the integrity of the electoral process" and "ensure that accurate and current voter registration rolls are maintained."<sup>4</sup> The goal of ensuring election integrity was embodied in Section 8, which requires each state to "conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove the names of ineligible voters from the official lists of eligible voters by reason of ... the death of the registrant; or ... a change in the residence of the registrant."<sup>5</sup>

The registration of a voter who may have moved may only be cancelled in one of two ways. First, it is cancelled if the registrant confirms a change of address in writing.<sup>6</sup> Second, if a registrant is sent a postage prepaid, pre-addressed, forwardable notice requesting address

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<sup>1</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20501 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(i).

<sup>3</sup> 10 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/1A-7, 5/1A-8.

<sup>4</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20501(b).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(a)(4).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(d)(1)(A).



Inquiry and Public Records Request

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confirmation (the “Confirmation Notice”), fails to respond to it, and then fails to vote in the next two general federal elections, that registration is cancelled.<sup>7</sup> Registrants who have failed to respond to a Confirmation Notice and whose registrations will be cancelled after the statutory waiting period are said to be “inactive.”<sup>8</sup> However, inactive registrations may still be voted on election day.<sup>9</sup>

Federal law requires the EAC to submit a report to Congress every second year assessing the impact of the NVRA on the administration of federal elections during the preceding two years.<sup>10</sup> Federal regulations require chief State election officials to provide data to the EAC for use in this report.<sup>11</sup> The EAC posted the most recent survey it sent to the states to elicit their responses for its biennial report.<sup>12</sup>

On June 29, 2023, the EAC published the data it received from the states, including your state, in response to this survey, for the reporting period from November 2020 through November 2022. Our inquiries concern the data you sent to the EAC, which are revealed in that release.

### Inquiries

1. According to the EAC, your survey responses show that 11 Illinois counties reported removing *zero* voter registrations from November 2020 to November 2022 pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B) of the NVRA for failing to respond to a Confirmation Notice and failing to vote in two consecutive general federal elections.<sup>13</sup> These counties are: Christian County, Clark County, De Kalb County, Johnson County, Lee County, Macon County, Marshall County, Pike County, Stark County, Union County, and Washington County.

Another 12 counties reported 15 or fewer removals under that NVRA provision during that period. These are: Bureau County (1 removal), Edwards County (12), Franklin County (11), Hamilton County (5), Henry County (10), Lake County (8), Marion County (12), Ogle County (11), Piatt County (15), Pulaski County (6), Putnam County (5), and Randolph County (4).

Within two weeks of the date of this letter, please confirm whether this data is accurate. If it is accurate, please explain why or whether you believe such data is consistent with NVRA compliance. If the data is not accurate, please provide the correct data.

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(d)(1)(B), (d)(2), (d)(3); see *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Inst.*, 138 S. Ct. 1833, 1841-42 (2018) (“federal law makes this removal mandatory”).

<sup>8</sup> *E.g.*, 11 C.F.R. § 9428.2(d).

<sup>9</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(2)(A).

<sup>10</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20508(a)(3).

<sup>11</sup> 11 C.F.R. § 9428.7.

<sup>12</sup> The survey is available at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled “2022 Election Administration and Voting Survey Instrument.”

<sup>13</sup> The data referred to is available at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled “EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023),” in Column CZ, which contains the responses to question A9e of the survey.

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2. Our review of the EAC's survey results revealed the following gaps in data reported by Illinois counties:

a. Thirty-four counties did not report any data regarding the number of voter registrations cancelled from November 2020 to November 2022 pursuant to Section 8(d)(1)(B) of the NVRA (for failing to respond to a Confirmation Notice and failing to vote in two consecutive general federal elections). Instead, in the relevant column where the data should have been, the state merely reported "Data not available," for each county.<sup>14</sup> These counties are: Adams County, Alexander County, Brown County, Cass County, Chicago City, Clay County, Clinton County, Cook County, Crawford County, Douglas County, East St. Louis City, Fayette County, Gallatin County, Greene County, Grundy County, Jefferson County, Kane County, Kankakee County, Knox County, La Salle County, Logan County, Mason County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Perry County, Richland County, Scott County, Vermilion County, Warren County, White County, Winnebago County, and Woodford County.

b. Twenty-nine counties did not report any data regarding the number of Confirmation Notices sent during the period from November 2020 to November 2022. Instead, in the relevant column where the data should have been, the state merely reported "Data not available," for each county.<sup>15</sup> These are: Alexander County, Boone County, Brown County, Champaign County, Clay County, Clinton County, De Kalb County, Fayette County, Franklin County, Gallatin County, Greene County, Grundy County, Henry County, Johnson County, Kankakee County, Logan County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Montgomery County, Ogle County, Richland County, Schuyler County, Scott County, Union County, Warren County, Wayne County, Williamson County, and Winnebago County.

c. Twenty-two counties did not report any data regarding inactive registrations during the relevant period from November 2020 to November 2022. Instead, in the column where the data should have been, the state merely reported "Data not available," for each county.<sup>16</sup> These are: Adams County, Alexander County, Brown County, Clay County, De Kalb County, Fayette County, Grundy County, Johnson County, Knox County, La Salle County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Piatt County, Pike County, Randolph County, Rockford City, Shelby County, Stark County, Union County, and Warren County.

Please provide us all of the missing data identified above for each identified county, within two weeks of the date of this letter.

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<sup>14</sup> The responses referred to are available at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)," in Column CZ, which contains the responses to question A9e of the survey.

<sup>15</sup> The responses referred to are available online at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)," in Column CJ, which contains the responses to question A8a of the survey.

<sup>16</sup> The responses referred to are available online at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)," in Column G, which contains the responses to question A1c of the survey.

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### Request for Records

Section 8(i)(1) of the NVRA requires that “[e]ach state shall maintain for at least 2 years and shall make available for public inspection . . . all records concerning the implementation of programs and activities conducted for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.”<sup>17</sup> That provision goes on to specifically provide that “[t]he records maintained . . . shall include lists of the names and addresses of all persons to whom [address confirmation] notices . . . are sent, and information concerning whether or not each such person has responded to the notice.”<sup>18</sup>

Pursuant to Section 8(i) of the NVRA, Judicial Watch requests that you produce the following records within two weeks of the date of this letter:

1. A list of the names and addresses of all persons to whom notices described in 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(2) were sent, and information concerning whether or not each such person responded to the notice.
2. Communications concerning the EAC’s 2022 Election Administration and Voting Survey, including, but not limited to, responses to Section A of that survey, and any records provided along with those responses.
3. All manuals, training materials, protocols, written standards, and official guidance concerning efforts to ensure the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.
4. All contracts with the U.S. Postal Service or any other federal agency to provide change-of-address information concerning registered voters.
5. All records concerning any internal or external audit, evaluation, assessment, review, analysis, critique, or request for or response to any of the foregoing, relating to the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.
7. Records sufficient to support any explanation you provided in response to the inquiries contained in this letter.

If we do not hear within two weeks of the date of this letter that you intend to provide these records, we will assume that you do not intend to do so, and will treat your course of conduct as a violation of Section 8(i) of the NVRA.

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<sup>17</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i)(1).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(i)(2).

Inquiry and Public Records Request

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Please contact us if you have any questions about the foregoing. We look forward to receiving your prompt response.

Sincerely,

**JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.**

*s/ Robert D. Popper*

Robert D. Popper  
Attorney, Judicial Watch, Inc.

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS  
STATE OF ILLINOIS

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September 1, 2023

Robert D. Popper  
Judicial Watch, Inc.  
425 Third St. SW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20024  
rpopper@judicialwatch.org  
*via email*  
*(attachments to be sent next week under separate cover)*

Mr. Popper:

I am writing in response to your letter dated August 4, 2023, which inquired about Illinois' 2022 EAVS Survey results and requested records under Section 8(i) of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 ("NVRA"), codified as 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i). As explained below, unlike the majority of states, Illinois is a bottom up jurisdiction, where local election authorities are responsible for inputting, maintaining, and cancelling voter registration records for their jurisdictions. List maintenance records like voter communications are maintained by the local election authorities, not by the Illinois State Board of Elections ("SBE"). SBE's responses to your requests for records are listed at the back of this letter, and responsive documents will be sent under separate cover due to their volume.

**Response to Inquiry and Summary of Illinois' Bottom Up System**

Your letter asks that SBE confirm the accuracy of certain information reported in the 2022 EAVS Survey. First, SBE's obligations under Section 8(i) of the NVRA are limited to producing existing records, not responding to interrogatory-style inquiries. Second, SBE does not have access to local election authorities' list maintenance records, as explained below.

Unlike the majority of states, Illinois is a bottom up jurisdiction, where local election authorities are responsible for inputting and maintaining voter registration records for their residents. Each election authority must "accept Voter Registration Applications tendered to it

under circumstances complying with the provisions of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993...” 26 Ill. Adm. Code 216.30(b). Any voter registration applications submitted to SBE directly must be forwarded to the county clerk or board of election commissioners having jurisdiction over the applicant’s voter registration within two days of receipt. 10 ILCS 5/1A-16(b), 1A-16.5(h)(2). The local election authority must then search its voter registration database to determine whether the applicant is already registered to vote at the address on the application and whether the new registration would create a duplicate registration. *Id.* 1A-16.5(i). The local election authority then decides whether the voter is qualified, and if so, enters the voter’s data into its local system, which transfers the data to IVRS, the statewide voter registration system. SBE maintains the technological aspects of IVRS, not the input or removal of voter data. *See generally* 10 ILCS 5/1A-25.

Under Illinois’ regulatory scheme for ensuring NVRA compliance, each local election authority is required to “keep all records concerning the implementation of programs and activities conducted to maintain the accuracy and currency of voter registration files for at least two years[,]” as well make those records available to the public for inspection. 26 Ill. Adm. Code 216.40(f). This makes sense, as local election authorities are responsible for determining a voter’s continuing eligibility to vote in their jurisdiction. Further, local election authorities, not SBE, maintain lists of all voters to whom a forwardable confirmation of address notice has been sent. *Id.* at 216.40(f).

Electronic Registration Information Center (“ERIC”) participation is the cornerstone of Illinois’ voter list maintenance scheme. *See* 10 ILCS 1A-16.8(a). The Election Code requires that SBE “shall utilize data provided as part of its membership in the Electronic Registration Information Center in order to cross-reference the statewide voter registration database against databases of relevant personal information kept by designated automatic voter registration agencies, including, but not limited to, driver’s license information kept by the Secretary of State, at least 6 times each calendar year and shall share the findings with election authorities.” *Id.* 1A-16.8(b). Illinois law also tasks SBE with cross-referencing the statewide voter registration database against the United States Postal Service’s National Change of Address database twice each calendar year and sharing the findings with the election authorities. *Id.* 1A-16.8(a). This function is also performed in cooperation with ERIC. Through ERIC, Illinois residents’ data is run for potential matches with the federal Master Death List and other participating jurisdictions’ data, in addition to USPS data. Local election authorities must then confirm any matches and make the required updates to the applicable voter records. *Id.* 1A-16.8(c).

Any request for more information regarding specific jurisdictions’ list maintenance activities and/or EAVS survey statistics should be made to directly to the local election authority.

### **Response to Requests for Production**

Below is a response to your requests for production of responsive records.

1. *A list of the names and addresses of all persons to whom notices described in 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(2) were sent, and information concerning whether or not each such person responded to the notice.*

SBE does not possess documents responsive to this request, as explained above.

2. *Communications concerning the EAC's 2022 Election Administration and Voting Survey, including, but not limited to, responses to Section A of that survey, and any records provided along with those responses.*

See records produced.

3. *All manuals, training materials, protocols, written standards, and official guidance concerning efforts to ensure the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.*

See records produced.

4. *All contracts with the U.S. Postal Service or any other federal agency to provide change-of-address information concerning registered voters.*

SBE does not possess documents responsive to this request, as change-of-address records are obtained through ERIC.

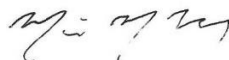
5. *All records concerning any internal or external audit, evaluation, assessment, review, analysis, critique, or request for or response to any of the foregoing, relating to the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.*

SBE understands this request as seeking communications relating to general list maintenance, not individualized inquiries like, for example, a citizen notifying us their local election authority has not removed their deceased relative from voter rolls. Subject to this qualification, see records produced.

6. *Records sufficient to support any explanation you provided in response to the inquiries contained in this letter. (Labeled as 7)*

The explanation provided in this letter is sourced from the Illinois Election Code, Illinois Administrative Code, and the enclosed ERIC agreements and bylaws.

Sincerely,



Marni M. Malowitz  
General Counsel



**Judicial  
Watch**<sup>®</sup>  
*Because no one  
is above the law!*

November 15, 2023

*VIA USPS CERTIFIED MAIL AND EMAIL*

Ms. Bernadette Matthews  
Executive Director, Illinois State Board of Elections  
69 W. Washington Street  
Suite LL08  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

**Re: Notice of Violations of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, U.S.C.**

Dear Executive Director Matthews:

I write on behalf of Judicial Watch, Inc. (“Judicial Watch”), Carol J. Davis, a resident and registered Illinois voter, and Illinois Family Action (“IFA”), to notify you that your office is currently in violation of Section 8 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (“NVRA”). We write to you as the chief state election official responsible for coordinating Illinois’ compliance with Section 8 of the NVRA.<sup>1</sup> This letter serves as pre-suit notice pursuant to 52 U.S.C. § 20510(b)(1)–(2) that Judicial Watch, Carol J. Davis, and IFA will file a lawsuit against you if these violations are not corrected within 90 days.

### **Background**

As you are no doubt aware, the NVRA was intended both to “increase the number of eligible citizens who register” and “to protect the integrity of the electoral process” and “ensure that accurate and current voter registration rolls are maintained.”<sup>2</sup> The goal of ensuring election integrity was embodied in Section 8, which requires each state to “conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove the names of ineligible voters from the official lists of eligible voters by reason of ... the death of the registrant; or ... a change in the residence of the registrant.”<sup>3</sup>

The registration of a voter who may have moved may only be cancelled in one of two ways. First, it is cancelled if the registrant confirms a change of address in writing.<sup>4</sup> Second, if the registrant is sent a postage prepaid, pre-addressed, forwardable notice requesting address confirmation (the “Confirmation Notice”), fails to respond to it, and then fails to vote in the next

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<sup>1</sup> 10 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 5/1A-7, 5/1A-8.

<sup>2</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20501(b).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(a)(4).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(d)(1)(A).



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two general federal elections, that registration must be cancelled.<sup>5</sup> Registrants who have failed to respond to a Confirmation Notice and whose registrations will be cancelled after the statutory waiting period are said to be “inactive.”<sup>6</sup> However, inactive registrations may still be voted on election day.<sup>7</sup>

The NVRA contains a public records provision. Section 8(i) requires that “[e]ach state shall maintain for at least 2 years and shall make available for public inspection . . . all records concerning the implementation of programs and activities conducted for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy and currency of official lists of eligible voters.”<sup>8</sup> That provision goes on to specifically provide that “[t]he records maintained . . . shall include lists of the names and addresses of all persons to whom [address confirmation] notices . . . are sent, and information concerning whether or not each such person has responded to the notice.”<sup>9</sup>

On June 29, 2023, the EAC published the data it received from the states, including your state, in response to this survey, for the reporting period from November 2020 through November 2022.

#### acts o ing iolations of t e List Maintenance ro isions of t e N RA

According to your state’s responses to the EAC’s survey, 23 Illinois counties reported removing fifteen or fewer and, in almost half of those counties, zero voter registrations from the list of eligible voters during the period from November 2020 to November 2022 for failing to respond to a Confirmation Notice and failing to vote in two consecutive general federal elections.<sup>10</sup> Another 34 Illinois jurisdictions simply did not report any data whatsoever to the EAC regarding removals under Section 8(d)(1)(B). Instead, in the relevant column where the data should have been, the survey response for each of these counties merely states, “Data not available.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(d)(1)(B) (“Section 8(d)(1)(B)”); (d)(2), (d)(3); see *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Inst.*, 138 S. Ct. 1833, 1841-42 (2018) (“federal law makes this removal mandatory”).

<sup>6</sup> *E.g.*, 11 C.F.R. § 9428.2(d).

<sup>7</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20507(d)(2)(A).

<sup>8</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i)(1).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, § 20507(i)(2).

<sup>10</sup> The data referred to is available at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys> at the link entitled “EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023),” in Column CZ, which contains the responses to question A9e of the survey. The following 11 counties reported zero such removals during that period: Christian County, Clark County, De Kalb County, Johnson County, Lee County, Macon County, Marshall County, Pike County, Stark County, Union County, and Washington County. Another twelve counties reported from one to fifteen such removals during that period: Bureau County (1 removal), Edwards County (12), Franklin County (11), Hamilton County (5), Henry County (10), Lake County (8), Marion County (12), Ogle County (11), Piatt County (15), Pulaski County (6), Putnam County (5), and Randolph County (4).

<sup>11</sup> These responses are also found at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys> at the link entitled “EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)” in Column CZ. The 34 jurisdictions for which no data was provided are: Adams County, Alexander County, Brown County, Cass County, Chicago City, Clay County, Clinton County, Cook County, Crawford County, Douglas County, East St. Louis City, Fayette County, Gallatin County, Greene County, Grundy County, Jefferson County, Kane County, Kankakee County, Knox County,

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There are other significant gaps in the data Illinois reported to the EAC. The sending of address Confirmation Notices is a crucial step in the NVRA's registration removal process. et 29 Illinois counties did not report any data regarding the number of Confirmation Notices sent during the period from November 2020 to November 2022, reporting instead "Data not available."<sup>12</sup> The designation of registrations as "inactive," pending their ultimate disposition, is another crucial step in the NVRA's statutory removal process. et 22 counties did not report any data regarding inactive registrations during the relevant period from November 2020 to November 2022, reporting instead "Data not available."<sup>13</sup>

On August 4, 2023, Judicial Watch wrote to you to pointing out these facts and asking you to confirm data contained in the EAC's report and provide data that was omitted. We also asked for certain public records pursuant to Section 8(i). On September 1, 2023, General Counsel Marni M. Malowitz responded on behalf of the Illinois State Board of Elections ("SBE"). She writes that "SBE's obligations under Section 8(i) of the NVRA are limited to producing existing records, not responding to interrogatory-style inquiries." Fair enough, but if you continue to withhold this information and we commence a lawsuit in 90 days, SBE will soon be compelled to respond to actual interrogatories, on these and other topics. Ms. Malowitz also claims that "Illinois is a bottom up jurisdiction, where local election authorities are responsible for inputting and maintaining voter registration records for their residents," and that "SBE does not have access to local election authorities' list maintenance records." But the NVRA squarely places responsibility for NVRA compliance on the state, not on its counties or cities.<sup>14</sup> Courts have rejected state efforts to avoid their NVRA responsibilities by claiming that they have been delegated to local jurisdictions.<sup>15</sup>

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La Salle County, Logan County, Mason County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Perry County, Richland County, Scott County, Vermilion County, Warren County, White County, Winnebago County, and Woodford County.

<sup>12</sup> The responses referred to are available online at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)," in Column CJ, which contains the responses to question A8a of the survey. The 29 counties failing to report data about Confirmation Notices are: Alexander County, Boone County, Brown County, Champaign County, Clay County, Clinton County, De Kalb County, Fayette County, Franklin County, Gallatin County, Greene County, Grundy County, Henry County, Johnson County, Kankakee County, Logan County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Montgomery County, Ogle County, Richland County, Schuyler County, Scott County, Union County, Warren County, Wayne County, Williamson County, and Winnebago County.

<sup>13</sup> The responses referred to are available online at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>, under the heading for 2022, at the link entitled "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)," in Column G, which contains the responses to question A1c of the survey. The 22 counties reporting no data regarding inactive registrations are: Adams County, Alexander County, Brown County, Clay County, De Kalb County, Fayette County, Grundy County, Johnson County, Knox County, La Salle County, McDonough County, Mercer County, Monroe County, Morgan County, Piatt County, Pike County, Randolph County, Rockford City, Shelby County, Stark County, Union County, and Warren County.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., 52 U.S.C. § 20507(a)(4) ("each *State* shall ... conduct a general program"); (c)(2) ("A *State* shall complete ... any program"); (i)(1) ("Each *State* shall maintain for at least 2 years ... all records") (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> See *United States v. Missouri*, 535 F.3d 844, 850 (8th Cir. 2008) (the language of Section 8(a)(4) "clearly envisions" that the state "will actively oversee the general program"); see *id.* at 851 (lack of local compliance "remains relevant to determining whether or not" a state "is reasonably conduct[ing] a general program" of voter list maintenance); see also *Sott v. S hedler*, 771 F.3d 831, 839 (5th Cir. 2014) (chief state election official's "coordination" power "includes enforcement power").

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Both common sense and Judicial Watch's enforcement experience confirm that there is no possible way Illinois and the SBE have complied with Section 8(d)(1)(B) of the NVRA, the key NVRA provision dealing with voters who have changed residence, when 52 Illinois jurisdictions either removed no or just a few registrations under that provision, or failed to report removals at all, for the past two reporting years. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that Illinois failed to report important data concerning Confirmation Notices and inactive registrations to the EAC. Nor is it possible, given these facts, that Illinois is complying with its list maintenance obligations to "conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove the names" of voters who have moved or died. *See* 52 U.S.C. § 20507(a)(4).

Our state's non-compliance with the NVRA is further indicated by the unusually high registration rates observed in many Illinois jurisdictions. Comparing the data your state reported to the EAC regarding the total registration numbers for each county<sup>16</sup> to the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent five-year estimates of the numbers of resident citizens over the age of eighteen<sup>17</sup> suggests that 15 Illinois jurisdictions have more voter registrations than citizens of voting age.<sup>18</sup> Several federal courts have determined that such high registration rates are sufficient grounds for alleging a failure to comply with the NVRA's mandate to make reasonable efforts to remove voters by reason of death or change of address.<sup>19</sup>

The foregoing facts amply demonstrate that Illinois is not complying with the list maintenance provisions of the NVRA.

### acts of Violations of the Public Records Provisions of the NVRA

Judicial Watch's August 4, 2023 letter also requested, pursuant to Section 8(i) of the NVRA, six categories of public records concerning Illinois' programs and activities to ensure the accuracy and currency of its voter lists.

The first request and the response we received from you on September 1, 2023, were:

*A list of the names and addresses of all persons to whom notices were sent and in or out of state.*

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<sup>16</sup> See the data at <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys> at the link entitled "EAVS Datasets Version 1.0 (released June 29, 2023)," in Column E.

<sup>17</sup> This data is found on the U.S. Census Bureau's website in table DP05 ("ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates"), by selecting "2021: ACS 5-year Estimates Data Profiles" as the data source and scrolling down to the heading, "Citizen, 18 and over population" for each county. For example, the relevant data for Adams County is available at [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5\\_2021.DP05\\_q\\_Adams\\_County\\_Illinois](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5_2021.DP05_q_Adams_County_Illinois).

<sup>18</sup> These are: Alexander County, Clark County, Du Page County, East St. Louis City, Franklin County, Kendall County, Lake County, Macon County, Massac County, McHenry County, Mercer County, Pulaski County, Sangamon County, Scott County, and Woodford County.

<sup>19</sup> *See e.g. Green v. Bell*, No. 3:21-cv-00493-RJC-DCK, 2023 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 45989, at 12 (W.D.N.C. Mar. 20, 2023); *Judicial Watch v. Colorado*, 554 F. Supp. 3d 1091, 1107 (D. Colo. 2021); *Voter Integrity Pro et al v. North Carolina*, 301 F. Supp. 3d 612, 620 (E.D.N.C. 2017); *American Civil Rights Union v. Martinez Rivera*, 166 F. Supp. 3d 779, 793-94 (W.D. Tex. Mar. 30, 2015).

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*on erning hether or not ea h su h person responded to the noti e.*

SBE does not possess documents responsive to this request, as explained above.

This request seeks a category of documents that the NVRA specifically requires states to provide on request.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, your response effectively concedes a violation of the public records provisions of the NVRA.

If you do not contact us about correcting or otherwise resolving the above-identified problems within 90 days, we will commence a federal lawsuit seeking declaratory and in unctive relief against you. In such a lawsuit we would seek, in addition to in unctive relief, a udgment awarding reasonable attorney's fees, expenses, and costs. *See* 52 U.S.C. § 20510(c). For the reasons set forth above, we believe that such a lawsuit would be likely to succeed.

Please do not misunderstand me. We have long experience with list maintenance litigation and are well aware of the practical difficulties states like Illinois face in trying to maintain their voter rolls. We are absolutely willing to compromise and work together to come up with a realistic plan to address these difficulties. We are always glad to avoid costly litigation and to amicably resolve disputes. In fact, we have a track record of resolving NVRA claims on reasonable terms.

Please contact us if you have any questions about the foregoing. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

**JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.**

*s/ Robert D. Popper*

Robert D. Popper

Attorney, Judicial Watch, Inc.

Attachments

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<sup>20</sup> *See* 52 U.S.C. § 20507(i)(2).