October 17, 2017

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL Re: Consideration of public proposals

Dear Chairman Beruff and Members of the CRC:

The 2017-18 Florida Constitution Revision Commission today issued a stunning rejection of the thousands of Floridians who invested considerable time and effort to share their ideas and draft proposals for improving their constitution. When the gavel dropped on the second and final hearing of publicly-filed proposals, only 6 of more than 2,000 public proposals moved forward for thoughtful study and consideration.

When the CRC launched its “public listening tour” last spring without first establishing any rules or procedures, we questioned whether public input would be meaningfully considered, or if the public hearings were just for show. CRC press releases have repeatedly hailed the numbers of citizens who invested their time and energy to attend those public hearings and submit proposals. But the metrics that matter are the results of all that participation. Did the CRC actually want to hear what people thought, or was it all about appearances?

Because the CRC only comes along once every 20 years, there are benchmarks of previous performance to help answer that question. Consider the metrics of the very last CRC held in 1997-98 as it wrapped up its second and final hearing to consider public proposals. Of a total of 696 publicly-filed proposals, all were read before the full CRC and 128 (18.4%) achieved the threshold of 10 votes needed to move forward for further consideration. Individual CRC members moved for consideration of another 69 public proposals that fell short of the 10 votes required to move forward. That was a stark contrast to this commission’s response to the public. The 6 proposals moving forward amount to less than .003 percent of those filed, and no other proposals even received a motion for consideration.

In addition to the 128 public proposals that moved forward for consideration by the 1997-1998 CRC, the commission sorted public proposals by subject matter and proceeded to consider a total of 30 “general concepts” raised by the public. This year’s CRC did not even bother to group proposals by subject – an exercise that would have revealed recurring themes. We recognize that the advent of online filings significantly increased the workload, but technological advances would have made it easier for staff to group proposals into general categories for further consideration. Presenting commissioners with subject matters that were repeatedly addressed by members of the public could have led them to look more deeply into a variety of issues and help them to focus on the areas of greatest
public concern. Such focus is sorely lacking this time around. It seems to be up to individual commissioners to attempt to bundle concepts into their own proposals.

The Citizens of Florida were told their voices would be heard and would shape this process. Actions speak louder than words, and this commission's actions are brazenly dismissive of the concerns and suggestions of Floridians.

Sincerely,

Howard Simon, Executive Director
Kirk Bailey, Political Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Florida

Andy Madtes, Executive Director
AFSCME Florida

Liza McClenaghan, State Chair
Common Cause Florida

Rich Templin, Ph.D, Legislative & Political Director
Florida AFL-CIO

Laura Goodhue, Executive Director
Florida Alliance of Planned Parenthood Affiliates

Joanne McCall, President
Florida Education Association

Barbara A. Petersen, President
Florida First Amendment Foundation

Terry Sanders, President
Florida NOW

Joseph Pennisi, Executive Director
Florida Policy Institute

Ashley Walker, Director
For Our Future

Pamela Goodman, President
League of Women Voters Florida

Mark Ferrulo, Executive Director
Progress Florida

Monica Russo, President
SEIU Florida

CC: All Commissioners

Contact: Lisa Hall, lisa@hallmediastrategies.com 850-508-7782