

Testimony for hearing on HB 2558

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The First Amendment clearly prohibits the making of any laws that abridge the freedom of speech. I find it particularly enlightening that the word abridge is used rather than “prevent” or “avert.” The definition of abridge means to reduce or lessen in duration, scope or authority. A legal definition would be to curtail the rights and privileges. By choosing to use the word abridge, not only does it prohibit the making of laws that would prevent freedom of speech, but clearly indicates that our freedom of speech shall not be diminished in how we choose to utilize that right or how long we may choose to utilize that right.

*In 2010 researchers from George Mason University ran a field experiment. In this experiment a candidate either left a pamphlet or delivered it by hand. There were two kinds of pamphlets, either a policy statement or a how-to-vote guide. The researchers found that what was contained in the pamphlet mattered much less than the method of delivery. While there was no significant difference in voter support between the two messages, voters who actually spoke with the candidate were roughly 20 percentage points more likely to vote for the candidate. The effect was largest among unaffiliated voters. I live in a district that is comprised of approximately 1/3 unaffiliated votes. The study showed that voters can be swayed by merely showing up at the door. It also indicates that by preventing door-to-door canvassing our freedom of speech is being reduced in scope and effectiveness. The general conclusion from the study found that the candidate's presence, more than their message, influences voters.

Local elections like state legislation, city council or school boards do not receive the benefit of heavy media coverage which typically means voters do not have a lot of information or preconceived notions about the race. Direct personal contact from candidates and their campaigns will often determine a voter's preference in the voting booth. When I ran a campaign as a republican in 2014 nearly 20% of the yard signs I placed were in the yards of democrats. That is completely due to the ability to communicate with voters face to face.

When you are knocking doors you meet a lot of people who don't live and breathe politics. That does not mean they don't care about issues, it may just mean they don't have time or inclination to promote them. By developing relationships at the door, we are able to make the people our elected officials serve, feel more comfortable in sharing their viewpoints on important issues.

In 1998 professors at Yale University studied the impact of three forms of voter communications by campaigns on improved turnout. The study used a 30,000 person sample from elections in New Haven, Connecticut. They studied telephone canvassing, direct mail and face-to-face canvassing by volunteers. They determined that the personal contact at the door from campaigns was the most effective at increasing voter turnout.

We live in a day where asking someone to show a driver's license to vote is being portrayed as voter suppression, or even racism. I would argue, and studies agree, not allowing campaigns have personal contact with voters on their doorstep, would be by far a more egregious form of voter suppression. If we allow this to happen in one community it will spread like a virus. I urge you to please take the necessary steps to ensure our rights are not infringed and our freedoms are protected.

**What Persuades Voters? A Field Experiment on Political Campaigning* by Jared Barton, Marco Castillo and Ragan Petrie. Published in *The Economic Journal* 24 FEB 2014