

# Mapping the War on the Right to Vote

At the Children's Defense Fund's recent national conference, Barbara Arnwine, the executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and a leader of Election Protection, the nation's largest nonpartisan voter protection coalition, issued an urgent call to action. Right now assaults on voting rights across the country in advance of the 2012 elections are keeping her very busy.



**CHILD WATCH**

Marian Wright Edelman

lawmakers behind these bills were counting on the targeted voters not noticing what was happening until it was too late.

Arnwine said 25 million Americans who had voted in 2008 did not vote in the 2010 midterm elections, and when new state legislators came into power after those elections, their first priority was figuring out how to keep those 25 million people from returning to the polls. Legislators in 35 states quickly drafted bills making it harder for people to vote: "everything from photo ID laws, to laws restricting early voting, to laws making it harder for third party registration groups to register people to vote, to laws making it harder for people to vote on Sundays because in many states that's when Latinos and African Americans voted the heaviest, to laws restricting student voting." Arnwine said the

to fight back exactly where the battlegrounds are.

Then we each need a plan. Arnwine and her colleagues are doing their part by suing states whose proposed laws violate the Voting Rights Act. But Arnwine stressed that every person can do something to fight in this war on the right to vote, and we each need to decide now how we will execute our roles. Begin by using traditional networks and social networks to make sure every single person you know is a "V.I.P.":

elections are what we call deceptive practices—people are going to get robocalls, and they're going to get fliers that claim they're from the NAACP and everything, telling people to go to the wrong polling place . . . if they're in the wrong polling places, in most states their vote will not count." Securing "V.I.P." status is critical to making sure people will not be disenfranchised on Election Day.

Next, Arnwine said, we need to counter the organized groups who are already planning to send "poll

them inside of the polling places also, so they can challenge people on the inside and nobody will know what they're doing. So we need good people sitting next to them, making sure that people have access to the ballot." Now is the time to sign up for these roles.

We can also volunteer at Election Protection Coalition Command Centers to help watch out for local problems. Finally, on Election Day every one of us must do the basic job of helping other people get to the polls—as Arnwine says even "if you're bedridden get up in the morning and call everybody you know: 'Are you going to vote today?'"

Arnwine summed up this way: "There is a role for everybody. Don't forget. If you forget everything that I said today, if you remember nothing, just remember this one thing: that we can only win this fight if you fight." We cannot stand by and let the right to vote be taken away again on our watch. Every one of us must decide what we can do in the fight to protect voting rights today. There's no time to waste.

*Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund*

"...the biggest devilment that goes on in these elections are what we call deceptive practices—people are going to get robocalls, and they're going to get fliers that claim they're from the NAACP and everything, telling people to go to the wrong polling place"

— Barbara Arnwine, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Arnwine then shared her Map of Shame: Voter Suppression Legislation by state, [http://www.lawyerscommittee.org/admin/voting\\_rights/documents/files/7-6-11-Map-of-Shame.pdf](http://www.lawyerscommittee.org/admin/voting_rights/documents/files/7-6-11-Map-of-Shame.pdf) that shows all of us who are ready

they have verified their voter registration status; they have the right identification for their state; and they know their precinct.

The last is important, Arnwine said, "because the biggest devilment that goes on in these

watchers" to African American, Latino, and student voting places to intimidate and harass voters, and we need to "get [our] friends to become poll workers, official poll workers, because that's what they're doing—they're putting

# You're Fired: 'Capital Punishment' in the Workplace

In employment law, they speak about a termination or firing as being the "capital punishment" of employment relations. This may sound dramatic – unless you have been fired. And, truth be told, if you do not have a labor union, you are really up the creek if you are terminated.



**TRANS AFRICA**

Bill Fletcher Jr.

I have a friend who is facing a possible termination. My friend spoke up about unprofessional conduct by a supervisor and, from that moment on, life has been hell. Prior to this incident, the performance evaluations my friend received were excellent. Subsequent to the incident, however, her work came under question, which then evolved into harassment. She went to the human resources department of their employer but they could or would not do anything. She attempted to transfer to another department but each time the transfer was blocked, good reviews and interviews notwithstanding. My friend was finally put on a 60-day notice to improve...or else.

Sounds familiar? It probably does. Most of us have either been fired or know people who have been fired. Contrary to the assumptions that most of us make, there are no laws that protect you from an arbitrary or retaliatory firing except under very specific circumstances. If you are fired for something that represents a breach of law, such as for race, gender, national origin, religion or handicap, you have a legal recourse. But in most situations, if your employer comes in one day and simply decides that they do not like you or that you are no longer needed, you can be fired. In fact, the law is clear that

you can be fired for any reason or no reason...unless you have a labor union representing you.

Firings are indeed a form of capital punishment. Your world is turned upside down. If you live paycheck to paycheck, you know what it means if that paycheck stops. Depending on whether you have any savings, you could, quite literally, be out in the cold (or the heat) with nowhere to go. On top of that, firings do something to your spirit. Even if you are completely certain that you did nothing to deserve the termination, over time you can start feeling isolated and start blaming yourself.

In today's economic climate a firing takes on even greater implications. One, it may take you longer to find a new job than it might have 10 years ago. Two, if you have healthcare insurance, it is probably tied directly to your job, meaning that the loss of the job can have catastrophic consequences. And, three, our identities are often tied in with our jobs – how we see ourselves, our accomplishments, and unfortunately, our worth.

In many countries a termination can be challenged in a court where, should you win, you may either get your job back or you get a special severance. In the

U.S.A., that is generally not the case. A labor union is the only means for most workers to gain any sort of workplace

justice. Through a grievance and arbitration process, the worker has a right to challenge an alleged injustice such as a wrongful fir-

ing. Workers should not live in fear of being presumed guilty for an alleged infraction and then have to prove their innocence.

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