

Forwarded 1808

TO the honourable the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Delaware—The petition of the subscribers, citizens of Sussex county in the same state, respectfully submits the following considerations with their prayer for the relief, which these considerations suggest.

BY the laws of the land, in all elections of governor, senators and representatives, also of representative to congress, levy-court commissioners, sheriffs and coroners, every white free man of the age of twenty-one years, having resided in the state two years next before such election and within that time paid a state or county tax, which shall have been assessed six months before the election, and the sons of persons so qualified between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-two years, although not having paid taxes, have right to vote.

It is self-evident, that this right to vote is of the greatest importance to those entitled to it. For in the exercise of this right are chosen—those, who make the laws—those, who appoint the judges, justices and officers to administer the laws and by their acts and judgments to bind and controul the persons and property of the whole community—those, who carry into effect these acts and judgments—and those, who lay the taxes. The importance of this right requires, that all those entitled to it should enjoy it fully and equally according to the letter of the constitution, which declares, that “all elections shall be free and equal.” Every voter must pay taxes to support government. Therefore every voter ought, without inconvenience, to have a voice and consequent influence in choosing those, who administer the government; that there may be assurance—that those, who by way of salaries receive the taxes paid by the people, shall render to the people an equivalent in their services; that government shall be administered for the general good; and that in receiving benefits flowing from government none shall have undue and unmerited advantages over others.

But your petitioners consider, that under the present laws, owing to the circumstance that there is but one place in this county for holding the general election, all the voters in the county do not fully and equally enjoy their right to vote.

George-town is the place, at which the general election in this county, according to the present law, must be held. Many voters in the county live at the distance of at least thirty miles from this place.

Those voters living within six or seven miles from George-town, can without trouble, inconvenience or expense go to the general election, even although the weather be bad or they have no means of conveyance. The aged and infirm can in most cases go these distances.

But those voters living at distances from fifteen to thirty miles from George-town, cannot go to the general election without much trouble, inconvenience and expense. Even in good weather, many voters, being aged or infirm or having no means of conveyance, are prevented from going to the election by the distances, at which they live from the place of holding it. To go these distances is a laborious, and in bad weather a very disagreeable task to those in good health and having good means of conveyance.

The consequences are obvious.

1. The right to vote is not fully enjoyed. For many voters in the county, at every election, are prevented from going to the election and giving their votes and thus enjoying their lawful influence in the state, by the distances at which they live from the place of holding the election.

2. The right to vote is not equally enjoyed. For while those voters living within six or seven miles from George-town can go to the election without trouble, inconvenience or expense, those voters living at distances from fifteen to thirty miles from George-town incur much trouble, inconvenience and expense, which if accurately computed would be seen to be no small tax upon them, in going to the election. In this particular, there is great inequality; those voters living at remote distances from George-town experiencing great disadvantages not felt by those living at small distances from this place—that too, in exercising a most important right, which the constitution explicitly declares “shall be free and equal.”

The present law for holding the general election at one place only in the county subjects the distant parts of the county to many other great and manifest disadvantages.

For the distant parts of the county have not the effect of their numbers and of course not their lawful influence in the elections, because many voters living in such parts of the county are prevented from going to the elections by their distances from the place of holding them.

Many other evils, necessarily resulting from holding the general election at one place only in the county, might be mentioned. These evils naturally suggest themselves, when it is considered that to exercise the important right of voting at elections many voters in going to and returning from the place of holding the election must travel forty, fifty and even sixty miles.

For these evils the remedy is manifest and easy. If provision were made by law for District-Elections, every voter in the county would live so near to the place of holding the election in his district, as that he could attend and give in his vote without trouble, inconvenience or expense. In such case, no parts of the county would enjoy undue advantages over other parts; every district, without regard to situation, would have in the government the weight and influence of its own numbers; and the full sense of every part of the county would be expressed by the citizens meeting, deliberating and voting in their own neighborhoods.

If we deemed it necessary to cite example to prove the expediency of district-elections, we could find examples for that purpose in all the neighboring states. For these, and most if not all the states in the union, have adopted and highly approve of district-elections.

Your petitioners therefore pray the honourable the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Delaware to provide by law for District-Elections.

And your petitioners shall ever pray, &c.

Edward Graham

James Wright
Peter Wright

John Carlisle Junr

Absalom Adams

William Adams

Levin Hubbard

Matthew Cannon

Daniel C. Adams

Clément Clarkson

Isaac Rags

Elijah Griffie

Wm. A. Ellegood

Wm. Jacobs

Abel H. Brown

Spencer Williams

John Outten

John Robinson

James Polk

Constantine Smith

James Conwell

Bartholomew Johnson

Shadrach Elliott

Joseph Cannon

Martian Gosler

Richard Garrison

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