Written by Kathy
Saturday, 16 March 2024 00:33

Washington, D.C. – Congresswoman Shontel Brown (OH-11) and Congresswoman Terri Sewell (AL-07) sent a letter this week to the U.S. Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, and Election Assistance Commission (EAC). It seeks information regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to intimidate, threaten, or misinform voters during the 2024 election cycle, Black voters in particular.

Both Brown and Sewell are Black, female federal lawmakers, and are Democrats. For a pdf of the letter, click here.

The letter, sent Wednesday, is directed to Attorney General Merrick Garland, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, and federal officer and Commissioner Benjamin Hovlandcomes. It comes as Ohio's March 19 primary election nears as well as the November presidential election, a rematch between incumbent President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, the presumptive nominee for the Republican nomination for president.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is already being deployed in political ads and communications to generate fake images and audio and   exp erts have warned
of the negative consequences this could have on voting rights and safe and secure elections.

The Brown-Sewell letter is signed by 33 members of the House and endorsed by the NAACP,

the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and Issue One and states the following in part:

"Despite our country's improved election security, the growing influence of AI software has raised concerns about the potential harm to our democratic process. We urge you to consider all its possible uses and ramifications in the electoral process, including its [weaponization] by adversaries of the United States." It also notes "particular concern about the concentrated deception targeted at Black and brown and other minority communities.

"AI generated misinformation aimed at voter suppression isn't a theory, it's already happening – and the federal government needs to have a plan to address it," said Brown, who leads Ohio's 11th congressional district. "The technology is new, but often the aims are as old as this country – to impede the rights of Black voters and other minority groups."

Brown added that " I am proud to lead this letter with Congresswoman Sewell because we cannot allow any voters to be intimidated, dissuaded, or misled."

"Generations of Americans, including many in Alabama's 7th Congressional District, fought to ensure that every eligible voter can cast their ballot in free and fair elections," said Congresswoman Sewell. "We cannot allow bad actors to weaponize powerful AI tools to mislead voters, suppress turnout, and sow chaos. With only eight months until November, the time is now for our federal agencies to protect Americans against such threats, especially Black voters who have been disproportionately targeted by election mis-information and dis-information."

The letter is signed by the following members of the U.S. House of Representatives: Brown (OH-11), Sewell (AL-07), Lawler (NY-17), B. Scott (VA-03), Goldman (NY-10), Holmes Norton (DC-AL), Deluzio (PA-17), Salinas (OR-06), Courtney (CT-02), Dingell (MI-06), Soto (FL-09), Plaskett (VI-AL), Grijalva (AZ-07), Kuster (NH-02), McCollum (MI-04), Schakowsky (IL-09), N. Williams (GA-05), Beyer (VA-08), Balint (VT-AL), Clarke (NY-09), Panetta (CA-19), Larsen (WA-02), Danny Davis (IL-07), Pressley (MA-07), Evans (PA-03), Schiff (CA-30), Watson Coleman (NJ-12), Magaziner (RI-02), Tokuda (HI-02), N. Torres (CA-35), Veasey (TX-33), Kilmer (WA-06), Trahan (MA-03).

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The NAACP called the fake AI content elusive and unregulated and a danger to the integrity of the voting process.

"This elusive, unregulated technology has the potential to disrupt our democracy through the spread of mis and disinformation. That's why the NAACP stands firm in our belief that generative AI must not be used to further this aim.," said Cedric C. Haynes, vice president for policy and legislative affairs for the national NAACP. "We will continue to educate our communities on this threat, but we can't do this alone. Our government must have a plan and take the lead on addressing and mitigating the danger that generative AI poses,

Advocates for the poor also commented.

"In the Deep South and across the nation, voters of color are facing so many barriers to exercising their voting power," said LaShawn Warren, chief policy officer at the Southern Poverty Law Center and SPLC Action Fund. "Increasingly, anti-democracy forces are using artificial intelligence to target, deceive and suppress voters. The Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security and the Election Assistance Commission have important roles to play, individually and collectively, to combat the unique threats posed by generative AI. We call on each agency to take urgent and focused action to address these threats and to protect the voting rights of all Americans and the integrity of our elections."

Also at issue is the impact of AI content on Civil Rights.

"Black and Brown Americans have been the number one target in recent elections for mass dis-information and mis-information campaigns. The widespread adoption of artificial intelligence is no excuse to endure more supercharged attacks on Black power and participation at the ballot box," said Alex Ault , policy counsel at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "The Lawyers' Committee applauds Representatives Shontel Brown and Terri Sewell for leading this effort to ensure that the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Election Assistance Committee are taking adequate steps to prepare for the impact of artificial intelligence on this year's elections. The time for action is now. Bad actors cannot hide behind new technologies to attack our democracy with impunity."

Others say that AI is simply dangerous to the pursuit of democracy and the integrity of the

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voting process, and that it perpetuates voter suppression."

"Artificial intelligence (AI) presents a serious potential threat to the integrity of elections administration. The misinformation generated by AI and propagated by bad actors will spark a rise in threats against the very individuals who steward our most sacred democratic processes. It will also fuel highly sophisticated voter-suppression efforts and sow doubt about election results, said Nick Penniman, CEO of Issue One."Issue One commends the bipartisan call from lawmakers for federal action focused on safeguarding our elections, and our election administrators from the potentially harmful impacts of AI."

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview.
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