



August 10, 2015

The Honorable Robert Goodlatte  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Goodlatte,

On the heels of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), we write to express our profound disappointment that you have failed to act on our requests for your engagement on the crucial issue of voting rights. Your unwillingness to take action is extremely troubling and, given the significant challenges that face this country, we are distressed that you have decided not to help protect the right of all Americans to access the ballot.

Leaders from our community met with you on May 6, 2014, and presented you with our white paper, [The Persistent Challenge of Voting Discrimination](#), documenting more than 150 voting rights violations across the country since 2000, and noting voting changes that had been implemented after the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court *Shelby County v. Holder* decision.

On June 25, 2015, the second anniversary of the *Shelby* decision, we joined with local civil rights groups to hold a rally in your district, attended by approximately 400 individuals. The rally garnered a great deal of public and media attention, and examples of relevant press coverage can be found [here](#) and [here](#). There were also several television pieces, including [this one](#). The outpouring of community concern about the need to restore the VRA could not be more clear.

As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, you hold the keys to a fair airing of the issue. Although you have thus far failed to hold a hearing to allow a fair process to proceed, we urge you to reconsider. You recently indicated that you “are certainly willing to look at any new evidence of discrimination if there is a need to take any measures. But at this point in time, we have not seen that, and therefore no changes have been made since the Supreme Court decision.”<sup>1</sup> To the contrary, however, new evidence is coming in every day.

Indeed, the challenges that voters face today in Virginia and across the country are real and ongoing:

- In your home state of Virginia, the General Assembly faces a court-mandated deadline of September 1, 2015 to redraw Congressional district lines, after they were found to have illegally packed African Americans into a single district, thus diluting their influence.

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<sup>1</sup> Petska, Alicia and Holland, Tiffany, [Goodlatte: Voting Rights Act remains strong without amendment](#), *The Roanoke Times* (June 22, 2015.)

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- In North Carolina, the state chapter of the NAACP is challenging H.B. 589, a bill that shortens the early voting period by a full week, eliminates same-day registration, requires strict forms of voter ID, prevents out-of-precinct ballots from being counted, expands the ability to challenge voters at the polls, and ends a successful pre-registration program for 16- and 17-year olds. Each of these provisions has a disproportionate impact on North Carolina's African-American and Latino voters.
- Texas enacted one of the strictest photo ID laws in the nation, requiring voters to present photo identification from a very limited list before being allowed to vote. The law allowed Texans to vote with a Texas concealed handgun license, but not with an ID from a public university or a tribal identification card.

On August 5, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit recognized that this ID law was discriminatory. The court's decision demonstrates why it's critical for Congress to take action now. The decision came only after a long, expensive and monumental legal effort, and too late for voters who went to the polls last fall to choose a new governor, other state and local officials, and members of their Congressional delegation. Those who were discriminated against were denied a vote in that election, and with it, the ability to decide who should represent their interests in Washington, DC, Texas, and their local communities.

- In the last two years, Ohio has imposed a number of barriers to voting that disproportionately burden African Americans, Latinos, and young people. These include limits on the numbers of voting locations and voting machines as well as restrictions that make absentee voting more difficult. Obstacles like these threaten to return voters in Ohio's minority and college neighborhoods to the lengthy waiting lines that discouraged so many of them in 2004. Litigation has been filed to eliminate these barriers to the ballot box, but lawsuits take time.

As Chairman of the committee, you have both the ability and the obligation to ensure that all Americans are treated fairly and equally. Beyond this, you have a responsibility to serve not only the constituents in your district, but also the broader national constituency. Your failure to hold a hearing on the Voting Rights Act after *Shelby* is a disappointing abdication of your responsibility to the Congress and to the nation.

Please feel free to contact either of us or Lisa Bornstein, Legal Director at The Leadership Conference, at [bornstein@civilrights.org](mailto:bornstein@civilrights.org) or (202) 263-2856 regarding this letter.

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Sincerely,



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President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
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