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August 10, 2015

The Honorable John Boehner  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner,

On the heels of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), we write to express our profound disappointment that the Republican house leadership has failed to engage on the crucial issue of voting rights. The VRA, together with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, remains the premier statute for the advancement of civil and human rights in the United States. And given the significant challenges that face this country, we are especially distressed that you and your leadership have apparently decided not to help protect the right of all Americans to access the ballot.

**The Leadership Conference and the leaders of the civil rights community request a meeting with you in September to discuss the need for House action and engagement of House Leadership on the Voting Rights Amendment Act, H.R. 885, and the Voting Rights Advancement Act, H.R. 2867.** Given the maelstrom of recent events in this country, where too many Americans do not have a meaningful voice in the processes that affect their lives, the need for congressional leadership is crucial to help our nation rebuild and our communities engage. We hope that you will join our efforts to become part of the solution, rather than continue to be part of the problem.

The anniversary of the VRA is not a time for a failure of leadership. It is when we can commemorate a significant moment in our nation's history, but more importantly, renew our call for action to protect voters. As we've seen across the country, despite the progress made by the VRA, the challenges that voters face today are real and ongoing:

- In the last two years, your home state of 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. Although litigation has been filed to eliminate these barriers to the ballot box, lawsuits take time and extensive resources.
- 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.

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

Voters around the country are fed up and angry that efforts to modernize the Voting Rights Act following the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* two years ago have been stalled. On June 25, the second anniversary of the *Shelby* decision, we joined with local civil rights groups to hold a rally in Representative Goodlatte's 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](#). As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Representative Goodlatte has refused to agree to hold a hearing. As Speaker, along with other House leaders, you can influence whether or not a hearing takes place. Beyond this, you have a responsibility to serve a broad national constituency. Your failure to consider voting rights 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.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson  
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President