



June 24, 2015

## CO-SPONSOR THE VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write to urge you to co-sponsor and support the Voting Rights Advancement Act (Advancement Act).

The introduction of the bill by Senators Leahy, Durbin, and Coons coincides with the second anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, a decision that invalidated the key enforcement provision of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). In its decision, the Court recognized that racial discrimination in voting continues to plague our electoral system, and called on Congress to revisit the enforcement scheme in the Act to ensure that it responds to current conditions.

We believe that the Advancement Act responds to the Court's directive and provides key protections against voting discrimination to compensate for the loss of Section 4 of the VRA, the provision that sets out the formula under which states are covered by the preclearance requirement.

The Advancement Act has received broad and vocal support from the civil rights community because it responds to the unique, modern-day challenges of voting discrimination that have evolved in the 50 years since the VRA was first passed. The Advancement Act recognizes that changing demographics require tools that protect voters nationwide. It also requires that jurisdictions make voting changes public and transparent.

The VRA is the most successful civil rights statute ever enacted by Congress. For the last 50 years, the work to protect citizens from racial discrimination in voting has been bipartisan work. The statute was passed with leadership from both the Republican and Democratic parties, and the reauthorizations of the enforcement provisions were signed into law each time by Republican presidents – Nixon in 1970; Ford in 1975; Reagan in 1982; and George W. Bush in 2006.

The VRA made it possible for racial minority voters across the country to participate equally in the electoral process. Because of the VRA, literacy tests, poll taxes, and other discriminatory mechanisms were invalidated. In recent years, the VRA has worked to block voting practices, such as redistricting plans, registration requirements, polling place changes, and voter ID laws that were found to be racially discriminatory.

Yet since the Supreme Court invalidated the key enforcement provision of the VRA in 2013, voting discrimination has become harder to stop. In states, counties, and cities across the country, legislators have pushed through laws designed to make it harder for minorities to vote. In the lead-up to the 2014 election, a resurgence of laws to increase barriers to voting, and dilute minority voting strength,

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have put the right to vote in more danger than at any time in the past 50 years.

Unless Congress acts, voters in 2016 will face the first presidential election in 50 years where they will lack strong protections in federal law to combat racial discrimination in voting. Congress can no longer continue to ignore the problem of modern voting discrimination. Congress must act to restore the VRA.

Recent polling from The Leadership Conference found that 81 percent of voters support the VRA and 69 percent of voters want Congress to restore it. This support is widespread among voters of all races, parties, and regions of the country.

Today, Congress must fulfill its obligations under the Constitution to eradicate voting discrimination by restoring the strength and effectiveness of the VRA. Fifty years after brave Americans gave their lives for the right to vote, we cannot allow their legacy and the protections they fought for to continue to unravel. We urge you to co-sponsor and support this important bill.

To sign on as a co-sponsor, please contact Senator Leahy's Senior Counsel Josh Hsu at 4-8415 or [Josh\\_Hsu@judiciary-dem.senate.gov](mailto:Josh_Hsu@judiciary-dem.senate.gov).

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Legal Director Lisa Bornstein at [bornstein@civilrights.org](mailto:bornstein@civilrights.org) or (202) 466-3311.

Sincerely,

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