



June 23, 2017

Support the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017

Dear Member of Congress,

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 urge you to co-sponsor and support the Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA) of 2017.

The re-introduction of the VRAA by Senator Leahy and Representative Sewell coincides with the fourth anniversary of *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court decision that invalidated a key enforcement provision of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). In its decision, the Court stated: “Our country has changed, and while any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions.”

The VRAA responds to the Court’s directive by modernizing the Section 4 coverage formula which determines the states and localities covered by the preclearance requirement detailed in Section 5. The new coverage formula would apply to states with repeated voting rights violations in the last 25 years. The bill also contains important protections for voters with disabilities, Native Americans, and language minority groups.

This legislation has received vocal and vigorous support from the civil rights community because it responds to the urgent need to stop the abuses by state and local governments in the aftermath of the *Shelby County* decision. Since the Supreme Court invalidated the preclearance formula of the VRA in 2013, discriminatory policies have proliferated in areas formerly covered by the preclearance requirement. In states, counties, and cities across the country, legislators have pushed through laws designed to make it harder for many communities to vote. While we have celebrated successful legal challenges to discriminatory voter ID laws in Texas and North Carolina, such victories occurred only after elections in those states were tainted by discrimination. Lost votes cannot be reclaimed and discriminatory elections cannot be undone.

In 2016, voters faced the first presidential election in half a century without the full protection of the VRA, and the effect was undeniable. As documented in The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s November 2016 report entitled “The Great Poll Closure,” countless voting laws were changed without public notice or scrutiny because *Shelby County* removed federal oversight and transparency requirements from states and jurisdictions previously covered by Section 5 – areas of the country with the most pernicious and adaptive records of implementing scheme after scheme to deny or abridge access to the ballot.

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The VRA is one of the most successful civil rights laws ever enacted by Congress. Because of the VRA, voters of color across the country have been empowered to participate equally in the electoral process – literacy tests, poll taxes, and other discriminatory mechanisms have been invalidated. For over 50 years, protecting citizens from racial discrimination in voting has been bipartisan work. The VRA 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 – President Nixon in 1970; President Ford in 1975; President Reagan in 1982; and President Bush in 2006.

Voting should transcend partisanship. No matter what policy issue we care most about, we get closer to these goals through the ballot box. The integrity of our democracy depends on ensuring that every eligible voter can participate in the electoral process. Passing the VRAA would be a giant step toward restoring the right to vote and undoing the damage done by the Supreme Court's Shelby County decision. 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.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Zubrensky, Chief Counsel and Legal Director, at (202) 466-3311.
Sincerely,



Vanita Gupta
President & CEO