



March 1, 2019

SUPPORT H.R. 1, THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the 50 undersigned organizations, we write in strong support of H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

H.R. 1 represents a transformative vision for American democracy. It would create a democracy that welcomes every eligible voter's chance to participate in civic life, and a democracy that demands integrity, fairness, and transparency in our nation's elections. For far too long, voter suppression has been a shameful reality in our country — undercutting the power and representation of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and other groups historically excluded from our political process. The ability to meaningfully participate in our democracy is a racial justice issue. It is a civil rights issue. And the need for legislative action is urgent. We commend the 235 House co-sponsors of this critical legislation.

Our nation will soon mark the 54th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday march, where John Lewis and 600 voting rights activists were viciously beaten and attacked on March 7, 1965 on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. History was made in August 1965 with the passage of the landmark Voting Rights Act (“VRA”), which sought to end racial discrimination at the ballot box. Nearly five decades later, in 2013, five justices of the Supreme Court gutted the VRA's most powerful tool — the preclearance system. That system had enabled the Justice Department and federal courts to block proposed discriminatory voting restrictions in states with well-documented histories of discrimination.

In the aftermath of the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, North Carolina, Texas, and other jurisdictions previously covered in whole or part by the VRA preclearance requirement began to implement voter suppression laws. In striking down the North Carolina law in 2016, the Fourth Circuit described the law as “the most restrictive voting law North Carolina has seen since the era of Jim Crow” with provisions that “target African Americans with almost surgical precision.”¹ There have been findings of intentional discrimination in at least 10 voting rights decisions since *Shelby County*.²

¹ *N.C. State Conf. of the NAACP v. McCrory*, 831 F.3d 204, 214, 229 (4th Cir. 2016).

² <http://www.naacpldf.org/files/about-us/Letter%20to%20Rep%20Goodlatte%20re%20Restore%20the%20VRA%20FINAL%209.7.2017.pdf>.

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The Trump administration has only made matters worse by damaging our democracy and institutions — from elections to the census to the free press. The administration’s assault on voting rights can be seen in the creation of the sham Pence-Kobach commission, a political ploy that was ultimately discredited and disbanded. We also saw it in its defense of Texas’s discriminatory photo ID law and Ohio’s voter purge efforts. The Trump administration has not filed a single VRA case, despite numerous recent state and local efforts to block access to the ballot in communities of color. Yet the Trump administration cited its need to enforce the VRA as its justification for adding an untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census — a justification that a federal judge recently found to be pretextual and unlawful.³

People turned out in record numbers during the 2018 election to reject this assault on voting rights and cast their votes for democracy reform. Not only is this reflected in the most diverse Congress in our nation’s history, but voters also cast their ballot to end gerrymandering and make voting more accessible in red and blue states across the country. However, many states continue to create barriers to voting, and that is why H.R. 1 is so critical.

H.R. 1 would enhance and ensure democracy in America by:

- **Committing to restoring the Voting Rights Act:** H.R. 1 contains a commitment to restoring the landmark VRA and updating its preclearance provision, which is crucial to ensuring that our political process functions fairly and equitably. VRA restoration is being pursued on a separate legislative track that will involve investigatory and evidentiary hearings, thus enabling Congress to update the preclearance coverage formula and develop a full record on the continuing problem of racial discrimination in voting. In 2006, the VRA was reauthorized on a unanimous vote in the Senate and a near-unanimous vote in the House. We need the same type of broad and bipartisan support for restoring the VRA today. Safeguarding democracy should not be a partisan issue.
- **Restoring voting rights for formerly incarcerated people:** H.R. 1 would restore voting rights for people with felony convictions, a necessary repudiation of our nation’s discriminatory and racially violent past. This would re-enfranchise approximately 4.7 million voters nationwide.⁴ Reforming felony disenfranchisement has bipartisan support; last November, 65 percent of Florida voters cast their ballots to restore the right to vote for over 1.4 million people.
- **Reforming voter registration:** In the November 2016 election, nearly 20 percent of people who were eligible but did not vote cited registration hurdles as the main reason for not voting.⁵ H.R. 1 would modernize America’s voter registration system and improve access to the ballot box by establishing automatic voter registration (“AVR”), same day registration (“SDR”), and online voter registration for voters across the country, and by ensuring that all voter registration systems

³ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5684706/Jan-15-2019-Ruling-by-U-S-District-Judge-Jesse.pdf>.

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/10/07/6-million-citizens-including-1-in-13-african-americans-are-blocked-from-voting-because-of-felonies/?utm_term=.be285eb259ee.

⁵ https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/committee_docs/Chiraag_Bains_testimony_HR1.pdf.



are inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities. AVR alone could add an estimated 50 million people to the voter rolls,⁶ and SDR increases voter turnout by roughly 10 percent.⁷

- **Combating voter purging:** H.R. 1 would overturn the Supreme Court’s troubling 2018 decision in *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute* that allowed Ohio to conduct massive purges from its voter rolls based on non-voting in past elections. Such practices disproportionately target and remove traditionally marginalized people from registration rolls. Voting should not be a “use it or lose it” right.
- **Prohibiting deceptive practices and voter intimidation:** H.R. 1 would ban the distribution of false information about elections to hinder or discourage voting. This provision is particularly important in an era in which Facebook and other digital platforms have been readily manipulated to spread misinformation about the time, place, and manner of voting to vulnerable communities. The bill would also increase the criminal penalties for intimidating a voter for the purpose of interfering with their right to vote, or causing them to vote for or against a candidate.
- **Banning voter caging:** H.R. 1 would ban voter caging and prevent challenges to voters’ eligibility to vote by individuals who are not election officials, unless the challenge is accompanied by an oath under penalty of perjury that the challenger has a good faith factual basis to believe the person is ineligible to vote or register to vote.
- **Creating a federal holiday and ensuring early voting and polling place notice:** H.R. 1 would make Election Day a federal holiday. It would also require at least 15 consecutive days of early voting, including weekends, in federal elections and ensure that early voting polling places are accessible by public transportation. The bill would also require that voters be given a minimum of seven days’ notice if the state decides to change their polling place location.
- **Reforming redistricting:** H.R. 1 would be a milestone in the battle against the extreme partisan gerrymandering our country has witnessed in recent years, by requiring states to draw congressional districts using independent redistricting commissions that are bipartisan and reflect the demographic diversity of the region. The bill would establish fair redistricting criteria and ensure compliance with the VRA to safeguard voting rights for communities of color.
- **Modernizing election administration:** H.R. 1 would reauthorize the Election Assistance Commission – an independent, bipartisan commission that plays a vital role in ensuring the reliability and security of voting equipment used in our nation’s elections. It would also promote election reliability and security by requiring voter-verified permanent paper ballots and enhanced poll worker recruitment and training. And H.R. 1 would prohibit state election administrators from taking an active part in a political campaign over which they have supervisory authority.

⁶ <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/case-automatic-voter-registration>,

⁷ https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sdr-Factsheet-Final_1.pdf.

H.R. 1 would also make significant advances in the areas of campaign finance and ethics reform. It would correct the rampant corruption flowing from the corrosive power of money in our elections. It would replace the current campaign finance system that empowers the super-rich and big corporations with one that relies on small donors and public matching funds. It would end secret election spending and force disclosure of all election-related spending. And it would call for a constitutional amendment to overturn the disturbing *Citizens United* decision that made it impossible to restrict outside spending by corporations or billionaires. In addition, H.R. 1 addresses our government ethics crisis by, among other things, requiring the development of a code of conduct for Supreme Court Justices to enhance accountability on ethics and recusal issues; overhauling the Office of Government Ethics to strengthen federal ethics oversight; establishing more robust conflict of interest requirements for government officials; prohibiting members of Congress from using taxpayer dollars to settle allegations of employment discrimination; and requiring presidents to disclose their tax returns.

H.R. 1 – the For the People Act – provides a North Star for the democracy reform agenda. It is a bold, comprehensive reform package that offers solutions to a broken democracy. Repairing and modernizing our voting system goes hand in hand with reforms that address the rampant corruption flowing from the corrosive power of money in our elections, and reforms that address the myriad ethical problems that plague all three branches of the federal government. The reforms in H.R. 1 are necessary to advance racial justice and ensure that our government works for all people, not just a powerful few. The civil and human rights coalition is strongly committed to expanding the franchise and fixing our democracy, and we urge Congress to pass this historic legislation.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
AFL-CIO

African American Ministers In Action

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees

American Federation of Teachers

Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Brennan Center for Justice

Center for Community Self-Help

Center for Constitutional Rights

Center for Responsible Lending

CLASP

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

Common Cause

Council on American-Islamic Relations

Demos

Fair Elections Center

Faith in Public Life

Feminist Majority Foundation
Franciscan Action Network
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Campaign
Justice for Migrant Women
Juvenile Law Center
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Conservation Voters
League of Women Voters, U.S.
MALDEF
Matthew Shepard Foundation
Muslim Public Affairs Council
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Action Network
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Organization for Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sierra Club
UFCW Minority Coalition