



January 19, 2021

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 220 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the 82 undersigned organizations, we write in strong support of H.R. 1, the For the People Act. We are pleased that the incoming Senate leadership has today announced it intends to introduce this critical bill as S. 1.

The For the People Act 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, people with disabilities, Arab Americans, and other communities 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. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the For the People Act in March 2019, and we are pleased that Speaker Pelosi has committed to making this bill a top priority in the new Congress.

The recent and deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol by far-right extremists attempting to overturn the free, fair, and secure 2020 presidential election was a catastrophic reminder of the fragility of our democracy. This violent insurrection did not happen in a vacuum. It was paired with numerous hurdles that voters faced during the pandemic-plagued 2020 election cycle and exacerbated by the relentless efforts by President Trump to undermine election integrity, impose barriers to the ballot box, and discount the votes of communities of color. These experiences reinforce the urgent need to repair our democratic system. The historic voter turnout in the November election despite these challenges demonstrated the determination and resilience of the American people.

Not every flaw in our democracy can be easily fixed, but there are strong and ready solutions to many of the most significant voting rights problems. H.R. 1 would enhance and ensure democracy in America by establishing many critical reforms in federal elections, including:

- **Ensuring early voting and polling place notice:** H.R. 1 would require at least 15 consecutive days of in-person early voting including weekends, for a minimum of 10 hours each day, and ensure that early voting polling places are accessible by public transportation.

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Women & Families

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Anti-Defamation League
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Vanita Gupta

The bill would also require that voters be given a minimum of seven days' notice if their polling place location is changed.

- **Safeguarding the right to vote by mail:** Sixteen states require voters to provide an excuse as to why they are unable to vote in person on election day in order to receive an absentee ballot. This practice is designed to impede the vote and was particularly galling during the COVID-19 pandemic. H.R. 1 would eliminate such restrictions on the right to vote by mail. The bill would require the prepayment of postage by the government on return envelopes for absentee ballots or voter registration forms.
- **Reforming voter registration:** Nearly 20 percent of people who are eligible but do not vote cite registration hurdles as the main reason for not voting.¹ H.R. 1 would modernize America's voter registration system and improve access to the ballot box by requiring states to establish 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 are inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities. AVR alone could add an estimated 50 million people to the voter rolls,² and SDR increases voter turnout by roughly 10 percent.³
- **Ensuring reasonable wait times to vote:** Voters in some states last year were forced to stand in line for more than 10 hours to vote,⁴ and recent studies have shown that such barriers occur more frequently in communities of color.⁵ H.R. 1 would require states to ensure that voters do not have to wait longer than 30 minutes to cast their ballot at a polling place.
- **Permitting voting without a photo ID:** Between 2010 and 2020, 16 states enacted strict voter identification laws. H.R. 1 requires states to allow registered voters in states with a photo ID requirement to sign a sworn affidavit to vote if they lack a photo ID.
- **Requiring access to drop boxes:** During the 2020 election cycle, some states politicized and limited the use of drop boxes. H.R. 1 would require states to provide secure drop boxes as an option for voters casting absentee ballots.
- **Restoring voting rights for formerly incarcerated people:** H.R. 1 would restore voting rights for people with felony convictions who have finished their sentence, a necessary repudiation of our nation's discriminatory and racially violent past. This would re-enfranchise approximately 4.7 million voters nationwide.⁶ Reforming felony disenfranchisement has strong bipartisan support;

¹https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/committee_docs/Chiraag_Bains_testimony_HR1.pdf.

²<https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/case-automatic-voter-registration>,

³https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sdr-Factsheet-Final_1.pdf.

⁴<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/13/more-than-10-hour-wait-and-long-lines-as-early-voting-starts-in-georgia>.

⁵<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/smartphone-data-show-voters-in-black-neighborhoods-wait-longer1/>.

⁶https://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.

in 2018, 65 percent of Florida voters cast their ballots to restore the right to vote for over 1.4 million people.

- **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, Twitter, and other digital platforms have been readily manipulated to spread misinformation about elections and voting rights 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.
- **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. It would establish fair redistricting criteria and 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.
- **Committing to restoring the Voting Rights Act (“VRA”):** H.R. 1 contains a commitment to restoring the landmark VRA and updating its preclearance provision, which is crucial to prevent racial discrimination in the voting process. 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.

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.

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 the For the People Act are necessary to advance racial justice and ensure that our government works for all people, not just a powerful few.

Congress must also pass two other essential racial justice and democracy reform bills: the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act – which would restore a critical provision of the Voting Rights Act gutted by the Supreme Court’s infamous 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision – and the Washington, D.C. Admission Act, which would grant long overdue statehood status to the nation’s capital.

Shortly before his death last year, Representative Lewis remarked: “In our country, the right to vote is precious – almost sacred. Countless people marched and protested for this right. Some gave a little blood, and far too many lost their lives. Around the globe, generations of U.S. officials boasted of this legacy and progress. Today, the world is horrified in watching Americans – especially people of color – once again stand in immovable lines and experience undeniable, targeted, systematic barriers to democracy.... Time is of the essence to preserve the integrity and promises of our democracy.”

Congress and the Biden-Harris administration must heed this call. As the 2020 election cycle and the recent violent assault on the U.S. Capitol made abundantly clear, our democracy is vulnerable and is in dire need of protection. We must enact transformational change to build a democracy that works for everyone. The civil and human rights coalition is strongly committed to expanding the franchise and fixing our democracy, and we urge both chambers of Congress to pass the For the People Act as early as possible in the 117th Congress.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Andrew Goodman Foundation
Appleseed Network

Arab American Institute
Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Blue Future
BOLD ReThink
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Common Cause
Communications Workers of America
Daily Kos
Declaration for American Democracy
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Demos
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund
Equal Justice Society
Equality California
Faith In Public Life
Family Equality
Feminist Majority Foundation
GLSEN
Government Accountability Project
Impact Fund
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Iota Phi Lambda Sorority Inc., Psi Chapter
Iota Phi Lambda Sorority-Epsilon Phi
Iota Phi Lambda Sorority, Inc.
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Japanese American Citizens League
Justice for Migrant Women
Justice in Aging
Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
Lambda Legal
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Women Voters of the US
Missouri Voter Protection Coalition
MomsRising
NAACP
National Action Network
National Association of Human Rights Workers
National Association of Social Workers
National CAPACD- National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development

National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National Homelessness Law Center
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women Of Achievement, Incorporated
National Workrights Institute
Oxfam America
Patriotic Millionaires
People For the American Way
People's Parity Project
PFLAG National
Prison Policy Initiative
Progressive Turnout Project
Public Citizen
Public Justice
Rock the Vote
SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
Silver State Equality-Nevada
Texas Progressive Action Network
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
True North Research
UnidosUS
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
When We All Vote
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
Women Lawyers On Guard Action Network, Inc.