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Interim President and CEO
Wade Henderson

January 13, 2022

PLEASE SUPPORT THE FREEDOM TO VOTE: JOHN R. LEWIS ACT

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 230 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write in strong support of the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act.

This legislation fills a distinct and critical role in combatting barriers to voting and protecting our democracy. Every American should be able to rely on a baseline level of voting access, free from obstacles to the voting booth or attempts to dilute or nullify their votes. Only passage of the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act can make this aspiration a reality. **We urge you to move swiftly and pass this legislation.**

For far too long, our elections have been undermined by practices and tactics intended to undercut the power and representation of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, people with disabilities, and other communities historically excluded from our political process. The Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act is a comprehensive package that would address these barriers, including by establishing uniform national standards for elections and restoring essential provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act would set a basic federal foundation for voting access for all Americans. It would require states to modernize voter registration by instituting automatic and same-day registration, protecting against discriminatory purges, allowing all voters to request mail ballots, and ensuring voters have access to early voting. The legislation would also permit voters who lack photo identification to use a variety of documents to establish their identity, restore voting rights to citizens with past convictions once they complete any term of incarceration, and prevent state election subversion.

Moreover, the bill would also ban partisan gerrymandering and ensure protections in the redistricting process for communities of color and people who speak a primary language other than English.¹ These reforms will make it easier for everyone to vote — and virtually all of them address barriers that disproportionately affect Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American voters and voters with disabilities and are modeled after reforms that have been successfully implemented in multiple states.

¹ The bill also contains other essential reforms as well, including a much-needed overhaul of a campaign finance system that [persistently disadvantages](#) communities of color.

The Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act would stop most of the worst anti-voter measures that some lawmakers are proposing and passing in states across the country.² For instance, the bill would eliminate efforts to roll back early voting by ensuring states offer at least two weeks of early voting, including on nights and weekends. Furthermore, the legislation would require that provisional ballots are counted within a county and create a minimum standard for secure drop boxes, as well as establish Election Day as a federal holiday. By providing a baseline set of national voting rules that every American can rely on, the bill protects all Americans, including voters of color, against efforts to manipulate those rules. In addition, it includes much-needed protections for groups including students, voters with disabilities, and military and overseas voters.

The legislation would also restore the essential provision of the Voting Rights Act that prevents the adoption of discriminatory voting practices before they go into effect by establishing a transparent process for protecting the right to vote. In addition, it will restore and strengthen other provisions of the Voting Rights Act to help bring down the barriers erected to silence Black, Brown, and Native people; young voters; people with disabilities; and new Americans and ensure everyone has a voice in the decisions impacting our lives. Finally, the bill includes the Native American Voting Rights Act, which protects voting rights for Indigenous communities who face myriad unique challenges to fully participating in our democracy.

The Voting Rights Act was passed with leadership from both the Republican and Democratic parties, and the reauthorizations of its enforcement provisions were signed into law each time by Republican presidents: President Richard Nixon in 1970, President Gerald Ford in 1975, President Ronald Reagan in 1982, and President George W. Bush in 2006. For more than half a century, protecting citizens from racial discrimination in voting has been bipartisan work.

Conclusion

In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act to outlaw racial discrimination in voting, and it became our nation's most successful and consequential civil rights law. Previously, many states barred Black voters from participating in the political system through literacy tests, poll taxes, voter intimidation, and violence. By outlawing the tests and devices that prevented people of color from voting, the Voting Rights Act and its prophylactic preclearance formula put teeth into the 15th Amendment's guarantee that no citizen can be denied the right to vote because of the color of their skin.

For decades, Congressman John Lewis implored his colleagues in Congress to realize the promise of equal opportunity for all in our democratic process. When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, he declared the law a triumph and said, "Today we strike away the last major shackle of ... fierce and ancient bonds."³ But 56 years later, the shackles of white supremacy still restrict the full exercise of our rights and freedom to vote. Before his death, Congressman Lewis wrote: "Time is of the

² <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/congress-could-change-everything>

³ <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-capitol-rotunda-the-signing-the-voting-rights-act>



essence to preserve the integrity and promises of our democracy.”⁴ **It is long past time for Congress to realize the promise of democracy for all and support the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act.** If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Jesselyn McCurdy at mccurdy@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
Interim President and CEO

Jesselyn McCurdy
Executive Vice President for Government Affairs

⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200719053551/https://johnlewis.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-john-lewis-demands-doj-action-anniversary-shelby-v-holder-decision>