May 26, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary of Health & Human Services  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20200

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

The Honorable Miguel Cardona  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20202

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7th St, SW  
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Marcia Fudge  
Secretary of HUD  
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development  
451 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20410

The Honorable Denis McDonough  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Marty Walsh  
Secretary of Labor  
U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20210

The Honorable Isabel Guzman  
Administrator  
Small Business Administration  
409 3rd St SW  
Washington, D.C. 20416

The Honorable Janet Yellen  
Secretary of Treasury  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington DC, 20220

Dear Secretary Becerra, Secretary Cardona, Secretary Fudge, Attorney General Garland, Administrator Guzman, Secretary Haaland, Secretary Mayorkas, Secretary McDonough, Secretary Walsh, and Secretary Yellen,

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, and the 106 undersigned organizations, we write to emphasize the urgency for your departments and agencies to take additional steps to implement President Biden’s Executive Order Promoting Access to Voting (“EO”), and to share specific ways we believe your department or agency can more fully meet the goals of the EO.
We first want to acknowledge the steps your agencies have already taken in response to President Biden’s Executive Order Promoting Access to Voting. The EO has provided an unprecedented opportunity for federal agencies to think about how they can further a goal that undergirds our entire system of government: protecting and promoting the fundamental right to vote. We thank you for the important commitments your agencies have already made, commitments we expect you and your teams are working hard to fulfill.

These commitments and the work since the EO was issued more than one year ago are significant because our democracy is facing extraordinary threats. The recent attacks on our democracy are unlike any we have seen in more than half a century. Since the 2020 election alone, state legislatures across the country have introduced hundreds of bills and passed dozens of laws that make it harder for people to register and to vote. These laws, alongside the voter suppression measures enacted over the last decade, make it especially difficult for voters of color, young voters, low-income voters, voters with disabilities, Limited English Proficiency voters, and other marginalized communities to make their voices heard in our democracy.

Simply, there is an urgent need for meaningful federal action to protect and promote the fundamental right to vote. Efforts to enact a federal legislative solution to the assaults on our democracy have stalled for now. As such, the imperative for federal agencies to do everything they can to harness the significant potential of the EO is even greater than when it was issued. While the commitments your agencies have made so far are a good start, they do not represent everything that is within your authority to do, and in many respects, they fall far short of the kinds of meaningful actions within your agencies’ reach that would ensure all eligible Americans are able to engage in the democratic process.

We are reaching out to each of you because we have identified specific ways your department or agency can more fully meet the goals of the EO.

First, we ask that your agencies commit to providing and supporting robust active voter registration services to the eligible Americans you and your partners serve. Each day, your agencies and partners interact with millions of Americans—a significant number of whom face barriers to voting—through interactions that could include the opportunity to register to vote. To date, however, agency commitments have mostly entailed putting information on websites or in offices, and/or sending letters encouraging third parties to voluntarily provide voting and registration information. Our organizations know from many years of agency voter registration work that these types of passive activities do not translate into significant numbers of voters being added to the registration rolls. Instead, eligible people are successfully registered to vote when they are offered active voter registration services. This includes being asked if they want to vote or to update their registration, receiving assistance as they complete the voter registration process, and ideally having their completed registration application collected and transmitted to the appropriate election officials or, if that is impractical, receiving a stamped envelope in which they can submit their voter registration application.

Additionally, we ask you to work actively to invite and accept designations by states as voter registration agencies under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). To date, only two federal agencies have offered themselves up for designation, and those in only a small handful of states. As far as we know, none yet have succeeded in being designated. Following the examples of motor vehicle offices and other state agencies, designation as an NVRA agency would provide a road map to ensure the voter registration services your agency provides are high quality and effective, and in turn to ensure all eligible people your agency serves have the meaningful opportunity to register to vote. While official designation
must come from the state, agencies can encourage such designation through active conversation with states and commitments to accept designation – commitments two agencies have already made.

We know that, for nearly all federal agencies, integrating this type of voter registration services into existing programs is new. Our organizations stand ready to provide assistance to you, your staff, and partners as you work to enhance your voter registration and voting access plans. We also encourage you to reach out to state and local election officials who have years of experience helping state government agencies providing voter registration services per the requirements of the NVRA. Some of the undersigned organizations have been in communication already with your agencies, and we would be thrilled to meet with you and your teams further to share our expertise and provide support as you determine what more your agency can do to meet the call of the EO and the urgency of this moment. Should you make more meaningful commitments in the coming months, our organizations stand ready to help drive successful registration through your agencies by educating the public about the ways you and your staff have risen to the challenge of the EO.

In the year since the EO has been issued, our country’s collective project of building a multiracial, inclusive democracy has faced grave threats. The urgency for the administration and federal agencies to do everything within your power to confront those threats, before it is too late, is greater than ever. We urge you to review the steps your agencies have taken so far and to work with your staff to make the additional meaningful commitments described here, to the full extent of your authority. In addition, some of our groups have already met with your agencies regarding implementation of the executive order and, to assist with those additional actions urged in this letter, we request additional meetings to specifically strategize about how your agency can commit to providing meaningful voter registration services and can pursue designation under the NVRA.

We are grateful for your leadership and look forward to hearing your additional plans to ensure your agency is doing everything possible to maximize the important role it can play in communities across America in service of protecting the fundamental and sacred right to vote. If you have any questions or to schedule follow up conversations, please contact Leslie Proll, Senior Director of Voting Rights at The Leadership Conference, at prol@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
ADL (the Anti-Defamation League)
Advancement Project National Office
ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
Andrew Goodman Foundation
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Blue Wave Postcard Movement
Brennan Center for Justice
Broward for Progress
Business for America
Campaign Legal Center
Campus Vote Project
Center for American Progress
Center for Common Ground
Clean Elections Texas
Climate Hawks Vote
Common Cause
CommonDefense.us
Declaration For American Democracy Coalition
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Democracy Initiative
Democracy Initiative
Demos
Earthjustice
EDF Action
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund
Fair Elections Center
Fair Fight Action
Fix Democracy First
Food Research & Action Center
Friends of the Earth
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church
Healthy Democracy Healthy People Initiative
Human Rights Campaign
Indivisible
J Street
Japanese American Citizens League
Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Conservation Voters
League of Conservation Voters
League of Women Voters of the United States
Michiganders for Fair & Transparent Elections
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action
Missouri Voter Protection Coalition
Missouri Voter Protection Coalition
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
NALEO Educational Fund
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Action Network
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation/Black Women’s Roundtable
National Community Action Partnership
National Congress of American Indians
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Negro Women
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Education Association
National Housing Law Project
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Partnership for New Americans
National Urban League
Native American Rights Fund
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Paralyzed Veterans of America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Action Fund
Prison Policy Initiative
Progressive Turnout Project
Project On Government Oversight
Promise of Democracy Foundation
Public Citizen
Public Wise
Rock the Vote
Secure Elections Network
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sierra Club
Sierra Club
SiXAction
Sojourners
Sojourners
Southern Poverty Law Center
Stand Up America
Students Learn Students Vote Coalition
The Civics Center
The Sentencing Project
The Workers Circle
Transparency International U.S.
UnidosUS
Union for Reform Judaism
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
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Vote.org
When We All Vote
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
Young Invincibles
YWCA USA

Cc Vice President Kamala Harris
Cc Ambassador Susan Rice