



January 18, 2022

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

**This vote will be scored by The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights**

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AAJC

Interim President and CEO
Wade Henderson

Dear Senator:

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. Voting should be encouraged and not discouraged in America. Every American should be able to exercise their right to vote with ease, 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 support cloture and move swiftly to pass this legislation.**

Our democracy is in peril. There is nothing more fundamental to American democracy than the freedom and right to vote. President Lyndon B. Johnson once called the vote “the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice.” That conviction drove his personal commitment to enact the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. America is at a similar crossroads today, and we must seize every opportunity to ensure that every voice and vote count.

We are troubled by the surge of recent state legislation restricting access to the vote. Many states have rolled back early and mail voting, added new hurdles for voter registration, limited or eliminated ballot drop boxes, imposed burdensome and unnecessary voter identification requirements, stripped power from state and local election officials, and taken other steps to make voting more difficult. Voters of color will bear the brunt of these new restrictions, in what amounts to the most significant assault on voting rights since the Jim Crow era.

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.

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 Reagan in 1982,

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.

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

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

While we fully support the ideal of bipartisan cooperation on voting rights, the partisan political agenda of some in the Senate cannot be allowed to block passage of legislation that has broad bipartisan backing.³² And we certainly cannot allow an arcane Senate procedural rule to derail efforts that a [majority of Americans support](#)³³. Eighty percent of people in America believe the Voting Rights Act is still needed and 70 percent favor the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

We believe that the right of every American citizen to enjoy equal and unfettered access to the ballot is sacred. Others are fighting to restrict the right to vote because they are willing to sacrifice democracy in favor of their partisan interests. We understand and support the role of the Senate as a place of deliberation and debate. To fulfill that role, the Senate must debate voting rights legislation without delay and votes should be taken — particularly on an issue that is so fundamental to our democracy.

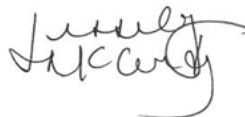
Any rule or procedure that functions to stop bills from ever being considered on the Senate floor is not a procedure to promote debate, it is a procedure to promote gridlock. And with state legislatures across the country passing more and more draconian bills to undermine the right to vote, our democracy cannot afford to wait any longer to protect the right to vote. If we are forced to choose between protecting the voting rights of Americans or upholding the right of a minority of senators to block a floor vote on a popular pro-democracy bill, our answer is clear. We strongly urge you to support the American people and the fundamental right to vote.

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

³ The policy proposals in the FTPA are supported by large bipartisan majorities across the country. A recent poll conducted the Global Strategy Group and ALG Research found that in West Virginia, 76 percent of registered Republicans support the FTPA. In Arizona, the bill has support from 78 percent of registered Republicans and 75 percent support from voters who backed Donald Trump in the 2020 election. In a meaningful way, the FTPA *is* a bipartisan bill.

⁴ <https://votingrightslab.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Lake-Research-Partners-Federal-Polling-Memo-April-2021.pdf>