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July 27, 2023

PLEASE SUPPORT THE FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 240 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the 34 undersigned organizations, we write in strong support of the Freedom to Vote Act (FTVA), S.1 and H.R.11.

The right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy. It is a fundamental right which preserves all other rights and freedoms. Facilitating the full participation of all citizens and all communities in our political process ensures that everyone has a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect our lives, our families, and our future.

Last month marked the tenth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which gutted the heart of the Voting Rights Act. In the decade since this ruling, we have seen countless measures adopted by states and localities to restrict and suppress the vote in every way, shape, and form. The voting discrimination unleashed by the *Shelby County* decision has had a cumulative and devastating impact on our democracy.

The Freedom to Vote Act is a powerful step in the right direction towards strengthening our democracy. It will help ameliorate the recent surge in voter suppression by adopting uniform voting standards for federal elections to ensure that all voters everywhere have expanded opportunities to cast a ballot. Importantly, the Act will address critical barriers to the ballot that disproportionately affect Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American voters and voters with disabilities. Notably, many of the reforms included in the Freedom to Vote Act have already been successfully implemented across multiple states.

The Freedom to Vote Act creates a basic national foundation for voting access for all Americans for federal elections. It would require states to modernize voter registration by instituting automatic, online, and same-day registration so that all voters can more easily participate in the political process. The legislation allows voters in states requiring voter identification to use a variety of forms of identification. The Act would make Election Day a public holiday, giving many people more opportunity to cast a ballot. Critically, the Act would restore voting rights to people with prior felony convictions once they complete their term of incarceration, addressing the longstanding practice of felony disenfranchisement used by many states to strip people of color of their right to vote after the abolition of slavery and passage of the 15th Amendment.



Importantly, the Freedom to Vote Act serves as a backstop against some of the worst tactics and schemes adopted by states to prevent or reduce participation by voters of color. Its requirement that all states offer early voting for at least two weeks prior to an election, including on nights and weekends, counters the rapid rise in efforts to eliminate or roll back early voting. The Act responds to increased restrictions on mail voting by requiring every voter to have the option to vote by mail, eliminating burdensome witness requirements and unfair ballot receipt deadlines, and mandating sufficient access to secure drop boxes. It protects against harmful and potentially discriminatory purges from voter rolls by requiring states to first verify that a registrant is ineligible to vote. It also addresses barriers such as excessive lines on Election Day, which disproportionately impact communities of color, by ensuring that lines last no longer than 30 minutes and restricting states from banning donations of food or water to voters waiting in line.

The Freedom to Vote Act includes timely provisions that address election interference and sabotage efforts that have been on the rise. The Act protects election officials from removal for partisan or political reasons and includes protections against the intimidation of election workers. It enhances protections around post-election ballot audits and prevents record tampering. And it prohibits the distribution of false or misleading information designed to deter voters from casting a ballot.

While the Freedom to Vote Act seeks to protect voters with disabilities by ensuring the same access to ballots as other voters and includes numerous other measures to protect their right to full political participation, we are concerned that its mandate for paper ballots will restrict access for many voters with disabilities, particularly those who have print disabilities. Requiring voter-verified paper ballots without exception may interfere with the right of voters with disabilities to privately and independently mark, verify, and cast a ballot, and ultimately, segregate voters with disabilities. For these reasons, we urge Congress to amend the Freedom to Vote Act to include an exemption to the paper ballot requirement for print-disabled voters. Voters with disabilities are entitled to full and equal access to a private and independent ballot, and the integrity of our federal, state, and local elections relies on our ability to hear the voices of all eligible voters, including voters with disabilities.

Significantly, the Freedom to Vote Act would ban partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts and ensure protections in the redistricting process for communities of color and people who speak a primary language other than English. This is especially important given the number of state legislatures around the country that used the 2020 Census to further their own political interests and draw maps that diluted the votes of communities of color.

The Freedom to Vote Act would strengthen our democracy, promote the full participation of all citizens, and help thwart the relentless assault by states on voting rights. But Congress cannot stop here. We need a fully restored and strengthened Voting Rights Act, and we look forward to working with Congress to introduce and pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which will update and modernize this seminal civil rights law.

Since 1965 when the Voting Rights Act was originally passed, Congress has had a remarkable history of strong bipartisan support for legislation that protects and secures the fundamental right to vote. Protecting the right to vote should never be politicized. We urge all Members of Congress to join in strong support of the Freedom to Vote Act to improve and strengthen our electoral system, and to continue to build an

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inclusive, multiracial democracy in which everyone's voice is heard. If you have any questions, please contact Leslie Proll, senior director of voting rights at the Leadership Conference, at proll@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
American Federation of Teachers
Arab American Institute
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Campaign Legal Center
Center for Popular Democracy
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Demos
End Citizens United//Let America Vote Action Fund
Fair Elections Center
Fair Fight Action
Hip Hop Caucus
Interfaith Alliance
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Women Voters of the United States
Missouri Voter Protection Coalition
Movement Advancement Project
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Urban League
Native American Rights Fund
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Project On Government Oversight
Public Citizen
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund
Stand Up America
The Civics Center
The Workers Circle
Transformative Justice Coalition
Union for Reform Judaism