

Eric Bunn Sr.
National Secretary-Treasurer

Dr. Everett B. Kelley
National President

Jeremy A. Lannan
NVP for Women & Fair Practices

January 13, 2022

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE) which represents over 700,000 federal and District of Columbia employees I write to urge you to pass the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act which combines key provisions of the Freedom to Vote Act and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

It is crucial for Congress to restore key provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that were wrongly invalidated by the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Shelby County v. Holder*. These provisions are critical to prevent state and local governments from passing laws discriminating against voters due to their race, ethnicity, or similar factors. *Shelby County v. Holder* struck the preclearance provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, allowing states to implement voting restrictions such as onerous identification requirements, purged voter rolls, elimination of same day voting registration, and limitations of early voting.

The fundamental right of all citizens to vote and participate in the elections process is key to our functioning democracy. Public servants defend and advance this right every day through their work protecting our environment, caring for veterans, and safeguarding our country. Voting rights restrictions have a direct impact on federal workers. A 2010 article in the *Social Sciences Quarterly* stated that public sector voting turnout was two to three percent higher than private sector union households.¹ Voters who favor a strong federal government and recognize the contributions of the federal workforce are more likely to show that support when they cast a ballot.

AFGE is a full and active partner in the traditional alliance between the civil rights and workers' rights movement. As such we are actively engaged in efforts to protect the right to vote and to have all votes counted, in protection against discrimination in the workplace, and enforcement of justice everywhere.

The preclearance section of the Voting Rights Act blocked discriminatory voting changes before implementation. Fifty-three percent of the states covered by the preclearance requirements imposed because of past discrimination had passed or implemented voting restrictions that disenfranchised tens of thousands of voters.² Immediately following the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, striking the preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act, states previously subject to preclearance (Texas, Alabama, and North Carolina) implemented restrictive identification requirements, purged voter rolls, eliminated same day

¹ Rosenfeld, Jake. "Economic Determinants of Voting in an Era of Union Decline." *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 2, 2010, pp. 379–396. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/42956407. Accessed 18 Aug. 2021.

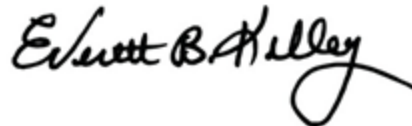
² Voting Laws Roundup: May 2021 <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-may-2021>

voting registration and limited early voting. AFGE opposes denying the ballot to any eligible voter.

Voting rights restrictions have a direct impact on federal workers. Statistics from the American National Election Studies indicate that union household turnout is 5.7 percent higher than that of nonunion households, and as noted above, public employees vote in greater numbers.³ Voters who favor a strong federal government and recognize the contributions of the federal workforce are more likely to show that support when they cast a ballot. Allowing new voting restrictions by states trying to limit legitimate voters from exercising their rights affect federal employees. These new limitations cloaked in unsubstantiated claims of “ballot protection” include limiting polling places and locations for casting early ballots, banning provision of drinking water to voters waiting in line and imposing onerous restrictions on absentee voting. Federal workers report for duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They count on utilizing voting options to exercise their patriotic right to vote.

AFGE calls on the House to pass the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act. For questions, please contact Fiona Kohrman at Fiona.kohrman@afge.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Everett B. Kelley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping final flourish.

Everett B. Kelley
National President

³ The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior, Household Union Membership 1948-2020
<https://electionstudies.org/resources/anes-guide/top-tables/?id=6>