

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of working families across the country, we welcome the introduction of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and strongly urge you to support it. The need to restore, modernize and strengthen the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is undeniable.

The labor movement and the civil rights movement share a deep commitment to ensuring the power of the vote and equal access to it. We fight for a better-quality life and for the real solutions that get us there, at the bargaining table and the ballot box. We know that when working families lose the right to vote, faith in our democracy erodes, and we are left with a system that does not prioritize helping working people, but instead prioritizes tax cuts for the wealthy over fair wages. Everything relies on voting rights, whether it is labor rights, healthcare for millions of people, public services and education, student debt relief, trade policies that center workers, retirement security, environmental protections, or the peaceful transfer of presidential power itself. As the late Rep. John Lewis once said, “The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in our democracy.” The linchpin of American democracy is participation at the ballot box for all, irrespective of race, income, religion, gender, age, origin, state of residence or ZIP code.

For close to half a century, the Voting Rights Act was the law of the land. Emerging from the African American struggle for voting rights, it put safeguards in place to prevent states and localities with a history of voting rights discrimination from limiting who could vote. The voting rights it protected enabled all working people to take an active role in shaping their futures. Its long history of bipartisan support includes five bipartisan reauthorizations, the most recent in 2006 with unanimous support in the U.S. Senate.

Yet, just over a decade ago, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* fundamentally undermined the VRA by gutting its preclearance provisions. Subsequently, the Supreme Court’s 2021 decision in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* further hindered efforts to challenge discriminatory voting practices. In the aftermath of both cases, we continue to see litigation aimed at hollowing out the efficacy of the VRA, with the goal of disqualifying voters and advocacy groups from seeking redress in court.

Unfortunately, threats to voting rights and undermining the VRA are not limited to litigation. Over the last few years, states have considered and enacted laws making the right to vote harder to exercise, especially for communities of color. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, in 2023, at least 356 restrictive bills were introduced in 47 states. Of those attempts, lawmakers ultimately passed at least 17 restrictive laws in 14 states. A toxic political culture and a lack of legal protections are enabling efforts to wear voters down and intimidate them into surrendering their vote.

Most of the states that have enacted or considered enacting laws that undermine the right to vote have a history of having their efforts blocked when the VRA’s preclearance requirements were in full effect. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would ensure all have a voice in their democracy. It would establish new preclearance formulas to prevent states with a history of

voter discrimination from enacting new laws that would suppress the vote. The legislation would also ensure that last-minute voting changes do not adversely affect voters by requiring officials to publicly announce all voting changes at least 180 days before an election, and it would expand the government's authority to send federal observers to any jurisdiction where there may be a substantial risk of discrimination at the polls on Election Day or during an early voting period. In addition, it would clarify who can pursue justice in court under the VRA.

The latest actions of state legislatures and conservative courts show that the protections of the VRA are still woefully needed. They prove that the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was right in her *Shelby County* dissent when she wrote that to use the success of the VRA as proof that it is unneeded is as wise as not using an umbrella in a storm because you do not feel the rain.

For decades, the VRA has served our democracy well; now is the time that it should be strengthened, not continually undermined. Our democracy faces many shared challenges, including division, fear and disinformation. There is an onus on lawmakers to act on many fronts, whether it is comprehensive reforms, election funding or regulating new artificial intelligence technologies. However, restoring the Voting Rights Act is a critical, commonsense first step. The durability of our democracy and the principle that every citizen can participate in it, no matter where they are from or how much money they have, cannot fade.

We want a country of hope and opportunity, where all citizens have a voice in our democracy. We urge you to recommit to robust voting rights throughout the country and to help maintain a democratic society by supporting the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

Thank you for considering our views on this matter.

Sincerely,

A. Philip Randolph Institute
Actors' Equity Association
AFL-CIO
AFT
Alliance for Retired Americans
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)
American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Postal Workers Union (APWU)
American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA
BCTGM International Union
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS)

Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)
International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
International Union of Elevator Constructors
International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)
Iron Workers International
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT)
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Laborers' International Union of North America (LiUNA)
Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO
National Association of Agriculture Employees
National Association of Letter Carriers
National Education Association
National Nurses United (NNU)
National Postal Mail Handlers Union
NFL Players Association
Office & Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)
Operative Plasterers' & Cement Masons' International Association (OPCM)
Pride at Work
SAG-AFTRA
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
SMART-TD
Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)
Transportation Communications Union/IAM
Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO
Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO
UNITE HERE
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)
United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)
United Steelworkers (USW)
Utility Workers Union of America