



March 5, 2019

**SUPPORT H.R. 1, THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the national hub of the community relations network, representing 125 local Jewish community relations councils and 17 national Jewish agencies, including the four main denominations of American Judaism, we write to urge you to support of H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

H.R. 1 would strengthen our democracy so that it welcomes every eligible voter's participation in civic life, and demands fairness and transparency in our elections. The Jewish community relations field has long worked to ensure that all eligible voters can cast a ballot and have their vote counted. However, for far too long, voter suppression has been a shameful reality in our country — undercutting the power and representation of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and other groups historically disenfranchised from our political process. The ability to meaningfully participate in our democracy is a civil rights issue. And the need for legislative action is urgent.

History was made in August 1965 with the passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), which sought to end racial discrimination at the ballot box. Nearly five decades later, in 2013, the Supreme Court struck down a critical Voting Rights Act provision requiring states with a history of disenfranchising minority voters to obtain U.S. Department of Justice preclearance before changing voting laws or procedures. In the aftermath of the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, without this oversight, states quickly enacted dozens of restrictive voting laws previously blocked by the government. In overturning a North Carolina law in 2016, the Fourth Circuit described it as “the most restrictive voting law North Carolina has seen since the era of Jim Crow” with provisions that “target African Americans with almost surgical precision.”<sup>1</sup> There have been findings of intentional discrimination in at least 10 voting rights decisions since *Shelby County*.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these laws, people still turned out in record numbers during the 2018 election to support voting rights and cast their ballots for democracy reform. The American people voted to end gerrymandering and make voting more accessible in red and blue states across the country. Unfortunately, many states continue to have restrictive laws on the books—that is why H.R. 1 is so critical.

H.R. 1 would enhance and ensure democracy in America by:

- **Committing to restoring the Voting Rights Act:** H.R. 1 contains a commitment to restoring the landmark VRA and updating its preclearance provision, which is crucial to ensuring that our political process functions fairly and equitably. VRA restoration is being pursued on a separate legislative track that will involve investigatory and evidentiary hearings, thus enabling Congress to update the preclearance coverage formula and develop a full record on the continuing problem of racial discrimination in voting. In 2006, the VRA was reauthorized on a unanimous vote in the Senate and a near-unanimous vote in the House. We need the same type of broad and bipartisan support for restoring the VRA today. Safeguarding democracy should not be a partisan issue.

<sup>1</sup> *N.C. State Conf. of the NAACP v. McCrory*, 831 F.3d 204, 214, 229 (4th Cir. 2016).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.naacpldf.org/files/about-us/Letter%20to%20Rep%20Goodlatte%20re%20Restore%20the%20VRA%20FINAL%209.7.2017.pdf>.

- **Restoring voting rights for formerly incarcerated people:** H.R. 1 would restore voting rights for people with felony convictions, a necessary repudiation of our nation’s discriminatory and racially violent past. This would re-enfranchise approximately 4.7 million voters nationwide.<sup>3</sup> Reforming felony disenfranchisement has bipartisan support; last November, 65 percent of Florida voters cast their ballots to restore the right to vote for over 1.4 million people.
- **Reforming voter registration:** In the November 2016 election, nearly 20 percent of people who were eligible but did not vote cited registration hurdles as the main reason for not voting.<sup>4</sup> H.R. 1 would modernize America’s voter registration system and improve access to the ballot box by establishing automatic voter registration (“AVR”), same day registration (“SDR”), and online voter registration for voters across the country, and by ensuring that all voter registration systems are inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities. AVR alone could add an estimated 50 million people to the voter rolls,<sup>5</sup> and SDR increases voter turnout by roughly 10 percent.<sup>6</sup>
- **Combating voter purging:** H.R. 1 would overturn the Supreme Court’s troubling 2018 decision in *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute* that allowed Ohio to conduct massive purges from its voter rolls based on non-voting in past elections. Such practices disproportionately target and remove traditionally marginalized people from registration rolls. Voting should not be a “use it or lose it” right.
- **Prohibiting deceptive practices and voter intimidation:** H.R. 1 would ban the distribution of false information about elections to hinder or discourage voting. This provision is particularly important in an era in which Facebook and other digital platforms have been readily manipulated to spread misinformation about the time, place, and manner of voting to vulnerable communities. The bill would also increase the criminal penalties for intimidating a voter for the purpose of interfering with their right to vote, or causing them to vote for or against a candidate.
- **Banning voter caging:** H.R. 1 would ban voter caging and prevent challenges to voters’ eligibility to vote by individuals who are not election officials, unless the challenge is accompanied by an oath under penalty of perjury that the challenger has a good faith factual basis to believe the person is ineligible to vote or register to vote.
- **Creating a federal holiday and ensuring early voting and polling place notice:** H.R. 1 would make Election Day a federal holiday. It would also require at least 15 consecutive days of early voting, including weekends, in federal elections and ensure that early voting polling places are accessible by public transportation. The bill would also require that voters be given a minimum of seven days’ notice if the state decides to change their polling place location.
- **Reforming redistricting:** H.R. 1 would be a milestone in the battle against the extreme partisan gerrymandering our country has witnessed in recent years, by requiring states to draw congressional districts using independent redistricting commissions that are bipartisan and reflect the demographic diversity of the region. The bill would establish fair redistricting criteria and ensure compliance with the VRA to safeguard voting rights for communities of color.
- **Modernizing election administration:** H.R. 1 would reauthorize the Election Assistance Commission – an independent, bipartisan commission that plays a vital role in ensuring the reliability and security of

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/10/07/6-million-citizens-including-1-in-13-african-americans-are-blocked-from-voting-because-of-felonies/?utm\\_term=.be285eb259ee](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/10/07/6-million-citizens-including-1-in-13-african-americans-are-blocked-from-voting-because-of-felonies/?utm_term=.be285eb259ee).

<sup>4</sup> [https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/committee\\_docs/Chiraag\\_Bains\\_testimony\\_HR1.pdf](https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/committee_docs/Chiraag_Bains_testimony_HR1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/case-automatic-voter-registration>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sdr-Factsheet-Final\\_1.pdf](https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sdr-Factsheet-Final_1.pdf).

voting equipment used in our nation's elections. It would also promote election reliability and security by requiring voter-verified permanent paper ballots and enhanced poll worker recruitment and training. And H.R. 1 would prohibit state election administrators from taking an active part in a political campaign over which they have supervisory authority.

H.R. 1 would also make significant advances in the areas of campaign finance and ethics reform. It would correct the rampant corruption flowing from the corrosive power of money in our elections. And it would call for a constitutional amendment to overturn the disturbing *Citizens United* decision that made it impossible to restrict outside spending by corporations or billionaires.

H.R. 1 – the For the People Act – provides a North Star for the democracy reform agenda. It is a bold, comprehensive reform package that offers solutions to a broken system. Repairing and modernizing our voting system goes hand in hand with reforms that address the rampant corruption flowing from the role of money in our elections, and reforms that address the myriad ethical problems that plague all three branches of the federal government. The reforms in H.R. 1 are necessary to advance racial justice and ensure that our government works for all people, not just a powerful few. We are strongly committed to expanding the franchise and fixing our democracy, and we urge Congress to pass this historic legislation.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Fishbein  
Chair



David Bernstein  
President and CEO