The Jewish people’s commitment to voting rights is rooted in our sacred texts, in our historical experiences, and in our commitment to cherished rights. A 2011 Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) resolution on elections began with the core premise that “The cornerstone of democracy is the election process.” Unfortunately, the integrity of the United States’ election process is challenged by the systematic disenfranchisement of key segments of the voting population.

Many of our Jewish sages stress the importance of a community in which the people have a voice in the selection of leaders. Hillel taught in Pirke Avot (2:5) “Do not separate yourself from the community.” Rabbi Yitzhak taught that "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a).

Our historical experiences throughout the centuries as an often-persecuted minority subjected to the whims of unaccountable leaders also instilled in us an appreciation for the value of free elections. This is among the reasons for the American Jewish involvement in the civil and voting rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. It is also why our community was instrumental in the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act which sought to overturn
decades of discrimination and intimidation at the ballot box.

JCPA’s commitment to the VRA is reflected in multiple resolutions including the 2011 resolution that states: “The VRA is critically important to ensuring that voters and communities of color have equal and unfettered access to the political process.”

The VRA has been reauthorized four times, each time with bi-partisan support in Congress. Each reauthorization was signed into law by a Republican president (Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush).

Unfortunately, the Voting Rights Act was severely weakened by the Supreme Court’s 2013 decision in *Shelby v Holder*. The Court struck down Section 4(b) of the VRA that contained a formula determining which jurisdictions with a history of disenfranchisement needed preclearance from the Department of Justice before making changes to voting laws or procedures. The effect has been to diminish the Voting Rights Act as multiple states quickly adopted new, restrictive voting laws. On Election Day 2016, 14 states had new laws on the books restricting the right to vote, often through onerous voter ID laws and limits on early voting.¹

Voter ID laws are cause for particular concern. ID can be prohibitively costly and difficult for individuals to obtain, and many older people or immigrants don’t have birth certificates or other documents. Importantly, repeated studies show that widespread voter ID fraud is a myth. A 2014 national study found

just 31 possible cases of voter ID fraud out of one billion votes cast between 2000 and 2014.\(^2\)

These new voting laws disproportionately and negatively impact communities of color.\(^3\) When one such voter ID law adopted by North Carolina was challenged in Federal court, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit overturned the law, saying its provisions “target African-Americans with almost surgical precision.” In 2015, courts also overturned restrictive voting laws in Wisconsin and Texas.\(^4\) Unfortunately, many states continue to have such laws on the books.

It is the duty of all who cherish democracy to ensure that all eligible citizens are afforded the opportunity to vote and have their votes counted.

**The Jewish Council for Public Affairs:**

- Affirms the essential nature of the right to vote for all eligible Americans;
- Calls on congress to adopt legislation to:
  - modernize the Voting Rights Act’s pre-clearance formula;

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o protect voters from the types of voting changes
most likely to discriminate against people of color
and language minorities; and

o require jurisdictions to make voting changes public
and transparent; and

• Opposes actual voter fraud and supports the prosecution of
those who commit such acts.

The Jewish community relations field should:

• Work in partnership with impacted communities to protect
the right to vote for all eligible citizens;

• Engage with state election officials to ensure the integrity
of voting; and

• Oppose measures that have the intent or effect of unfairly
limiting the right to vote, for example through reduced
locally accessible polling locations, onerous voter ID laws,
curtailed early voting, or other measures.