

JOHN R. LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT OF 2023

A BILL TO PROTECT EVERY AMERICAN'S INHERENT RIGHT TO VOTE BY
MODERNIZING THE BIPARTISAN VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

OUR POSITION

Our democracy is not a given; it has been contested since our nation's founding and must be fought for, defended, and constantly expanded. The right to vote represents the lifeblood of our democracy; it is what gives democracy its legitimacy and power. Morally, suppressing the right to vote is a direct assault on both our civic equality and our Christian conviction that all people are made in the image of God.

HIGHLIGHT OF SUPPORTERS

- Sojourners-SojoAction
- AFL-CIO
- Alliance of Baptists
- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC)
- Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
- Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
- Church World Service
- Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
- Declaration for American Democracy Coalition
- Faith in Public Life
- Faithful Democracy
- Franciscan Action Network
- Interfaith Alliance
- Interfaith Power & Light
- Justice Revival
- Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund)
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Council of Jewish Women
- The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

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Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL-07)

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL)

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CURRENT SPONSORS:*

House: 215

Senate: 50

*as of 03.01.24

WHAT THE BILL WOULD DO

The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 14) would modernize and revitalize the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Supreme Court has hampered the law by gutting its preclearance provisions in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and by making it harder to sue to stop discriminatory practices in *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021). The John Lewis Act would strengthen the law, moving us closer to ending discrimination in voting and guaranteeing equal access to the ballot. If passed, this bill finally restores the full promise of the VRA by:

- Restores and modernizes the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by creating a new coverage formula and updates the VRA's preclearance provision to focus on states with a recent history of discrimination
- Establishes a targeted process for reviewing voting law changes based on measures that have historically been used to discriminate against voters by creating a process-based trigger for reviewing changes such as establishing photo ID laws or reducing multilingual voting materials, which have been shown to have a discriminatory impact;
- Amends Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act to codify the original standard to challenge racially discriminatory laws;
- Ensures federal courts can immediately halt questionable voting practices;
- Gives the Attorney General authority to request that federal observers be present where discriminatory practices pose a serious threat; and,
- Increases transparency by requiring reasonable public notice for voting law changes.

WHY CONGRESS SHOULD ENACT THIS LEGISLATION

- No matter where we live or what our background, Americans want fair elections, where we all have the freedom to vote and make our voices heard on important issues such as providing affordable health care, creating good jobs, and ensuring quality education;
- As people of faith, we share a vision of a democracy that reflects the soul of our nation and reject democratic systems that perpetuate systemic racism, commodify poverty, and restrict the right to vote as a direct assault on our faith convictions;
- Unfortunately, the very foundation of our democracy—free and fair elections—is in danger. Many states are passing laws restricting access to voting and promote state-sanctioned voter suppression;
- Any law that restricts the sacred right to vote is unjust because it denies citizens their agency and voice. Put in theological terms, unjust laws assault the *imago Dei*, the core belief that every person is made in God's divine image. What is true for unjust laws, is also true for unjust rules;
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been extended three times since it was introduced, with bipartisan support and under Republican presidents like Nixon and both Bushes. In fact, Senator McConnell and fifteen other current Republican Senators voted to extend the VRA by a margin of 98-0 in 2006;
- Even Strom Thurmond, staunch opponent of Civil Rights legislation in the 50s and 60s, who used the filibuster to cudgel efforts to bring equality to all, eventually supported Voting Rights legislation. What is the current excuse for inaction and chaos today?;
- Our voice is our vote. It is our power and it is our might. Isaiah 10:1-2 makes it clear—woe to those who pass unjust laws. This bill is a remedy to that injustice.

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