

August 3, 2015

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the undersigned LGBTQ organizations, we urge you to co-sponsor the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (HR. 2867; S. 1659). This bill is essential in our collective efforts to restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) and to ensure that all eligible voters are able to participate fully in our democracy, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) voters. The passage of the VRAA will create constitutionally sound policies to protect eligible voters from tactics designed to restrict their voting access.

It is without question that voting rights are a fundamental and essential component of participating in the U.S. democracy. But, over the course of our history as a nation, voting rights have been a political battleground intended to silence the voice of minority populations. This summer marks the 50th anniversary of the VRA's passage and voter suppression tactics continue to emerge that restrict eligible voters from accessing the polls and exercising their civic duty. Following the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, the hard-won protections in the VRA were stripped of necessary protections and oversight.

To be clear, voting rights are an LGBTQ issue. We know that LGBTQ people come from all backgrounds and that—compared to the general population—members of the LGBTQ community are far more likely to identify as people of color, to have a disability, to live in poverty, to experience homelessness, or to come into contact with the criminal justice system. Moreover, LGBTQ people, particularly transgender and gender nonconforming people are far more likely to lack valid photo ID due to the patchwork of discriminatory laws that regulate name and gender change.

The current state of voting rights is appalling. In the last five years, we have seen a resurgence of laws/policies introduced at the state and local level to restrict the voting access of eligible voters. These laws have an adverse impact on certain voters, such as people of color, people with disabilities, people with low income or limited financial access, people who are experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ people, women, students, older adults, and people with prior felony convictions. These laws/policies are barriers for eligible voters seeking to exercise their civic duty.

The Voting Rights Advancement Act will restore the necessary protections of the VRA. It will respond to the unique challenge of voter discrimination practices that have evolved over the last 50 years, including modernizing the Federal preclearance formula to cover states with a history of voter discrimination and strengthening the ability of the courts to protect citizens from discriminatory voting practices, whether intended or not. It also requires districts to publicly disclose changes and information related to voting in the district and expands the federal observer program so that federal observers can continue to keep voters safe from discrimination and harassment.

We urge you to stand in support of the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015. Your co-sponsorship of this legislation serves as a recognition that enacting protections for voting rights is an essential part of building a healthy democracy. To sign on as a co-sponsor in the Senate, please contact Senator Leahy's Senior Counsel Josh Hsu at [Josh\\_Hsu@judiciary-dem.senate.gov](mailto:Josh_Hsu@judiciary-dem.senate.gov). To sign on as a co-sponsor in the House, please contact Representative Sewell's Legislative Director Cachavious English at [cachavious.english@mail.house.gov](mailto:cachavious.english@mail.house.gov).

Now more than ever, it is important to ensure that the protections of the VRA are restored. Thank you for your consideration of the VRAA.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth

AIDS United

American Civil Liberties Union

Athlete Ally

Believe Out Loud

BiNet USA

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Equality Federation

Family Equality Council

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)

GLAAD

Global Justice Institute

Human Rights Campaign

Lambda Legal

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Marriage Equality USA

Metropolitan Community Churches

National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors

National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC)

National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)

National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)

National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC)

National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund

National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)

NMAC

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates

People For the American Way

PFLAG National

Pride at Work