



## CALLING FOR FAITHFUL REFORMS

The United States is the world's oldest democracy, but we know that it was founded upon a system of exclusion. At the birth of the nation, our democratic systems were designed to ensure that power was securely held by wealthy white men, despite the ideals of a representative government. Almost 250 years later, we are still contending with that legacy of excluding marginalized communities from our democracy. The January 6th violent attack on our Capitol should not be understood as simply a reaction to the loss of an election or the call for insurrection from the outgoing president. This event culminated years of ignoring structural weaknesses, white supremacy and institutional racism that undermine democratic systems and public trust. Our democracy continues to be exposed to suppressive tactics and manipulation — we must immediately fix it.

### WHO WE ARE

Faithful Democracy is a national multi-faith coalition of faith-based organizations and congregations sharing a moral imperative to fix our democracy. We support a broad array of federal reforms to create a fair, functional, and healthy democratic systems. We seek reforms that better align our systems with the ideals we hold dear: racial equity and dignity, participation, and agency in creating a better world, communal responsibility and servant-leadership.

### THE DISTORTION OF DEMOCRACY

Reforms to address the outsized influence of money in politics, to protect voting rights, to strengthen accountability of elected leaders, and to ensure fair representation have languished in Congress for decades. In the meantime, harmful Supreme Court rulings like *Shelby* and *Citizens United* accelerated disturbing trends of voter suppression that have further undermined public faith in our democracy.

In the 2020 election, low income communities and communities of color experienced unprecedented voter suppression by gerrymandered state legislatures. We also witnessed historic levels of dark money drown out the voices of everyday voters and a concerted misinformation campaign strategically aimed at undermining civic trust. Then, after ballots were counted and recounted in many states, ethical abuses sought to overturn election results anyway. The COVID pandemic laid bare the systemic weaknesses and vulnerabilities in our election systems, underscoring the urgent need for transformational democracy reforms.

### THE FAITHFUL RESPONSE: *FOR THE PEOPLE ACT* (H.R.1/S.1)

The *For the People Act* is bold, comprehensive bill that would increase the accessibility and transparency of our democracy by bolstering the power of voters, limiting the influence of big money, and curbing unethical practices of elected leaders. Among other key reforms, this comprehensive legislation sets baseline standards

### MATTERS OF FAITH

The priorities of the faith community often reflect interests of the common good or the most vulnerable in society. The influence of special interests over decision-makers often overshadow, or even undermine, our priorities. As a result, many have languished in Congress without meaningful action. ***Feeding the poor, combating climate change, gun violence prevention, human rights protections, healthcare for all, housing the displaced, criminal justice reforms, advancing racial justice and poverty reduction all require democracy reform.*** We need a healthy democratic foundation to address the most critical, urgent demands of these times.

to ensure voters' access to the ballot, no matter where they live. The *For the People Act* is designated as the priority legislation in both chambers and includes measures that have overwhelming public support. The passage of H.R.1/S.1 would build a more equitable and fair democracy by:

### ***Expanding Voting Rights and Increasing Election Security***

- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 modernizes voter registration and access to the ballot to set minimum standards for voters in federal elections. The bill protects voting rights by either eliminating rules known to disproportionately disenfranchise Black and Brown voters or by mandating alternatives to accommodate the needs of low-income and communities of color.
- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 requires states to adopt best practices for increasing voter registration in federal elections, including online voter registration, automatic registration for eligible voters, and same day voter registration. These reforms have improved turn-out among voters of color and have significantly increased registration rates in Black and Brown communities in states where they apply. Additionally, the bill protects against improper purges of registration rolls—a practice known to disproportionately impact eligible voters of color.
- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 restores the right to vote to people with prior criminal convictions, a harmful legacy of racial discrimination known to disenfranchise low-income and voters of color.
- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 improves election administration with national standards for access to the ballot. Voters can count on voting by mail without burdensome requirements or restrictions, 15 days of early in-person voting.
- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 establishes standards and process for drawing federal congressional districts, banning racial and partisan gerrymandering and requiring states to use independent redistricting commissions.

### ***Reducing the Influence of Big Money in Politics***

- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 empowers low-income donors by creating a small donor matching system to finance campaigns. This in-turn frees officeholders to represent their constituents rather than wealthy megadonors. The system is financed by a small surcharge on criminal fines and penalties against corporations, corporate executives, and high-income tax evaders. The small donor matching system empowers low-income and donors of color while penalizing the wealthiest bad actors.
- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 promotes transparency by requiring shadow money organizations to disclose their donors and by strengthening funding and oversight of campaign finance and political spending.

### ***Enhancing Ethics Standards for Government***

- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 strengthens enforcement of ethics rules and broadens conflict of interest laws related to personal financial interests. It slows the “revolving door” between government officials and lobbyists.
- ✓ H.R.1/S.1 requires presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns publicly and makes members of the U.S. Supreme Court accountable to a judicial code of ethics.

## **NOW IS THE TIME FOR MORAL LEADERSHIP**

We stand upon the precipice. The recent physical attack on the halls of Congress was a culmination of the deeper assault on democracy that has been fomenting for years. It demonstrated just how strong the currents of white supremacy run and the compulsion to reject voters of color from our democratic processes. In many states, the election fraud disinformation campaign used to target communities of color is now being used to pursue new laws making it harder to vote. The redistricting process will begin later this year and will be rife with tactical gerrymandering to set the stage for another decade of extreme partisanship.

The choice now is for Congress to recognize this moment for what it is: an opportunity to enact transformative legislation that builds up a democracy accessible to all of its citizens. Now is the time to repudiate the politics of exclusion, hatred, and oppression. This is the time to show the moral courage to save our democracy and pass the *For the People Act*.

