



**For Immediate Release:** August 20, 2021

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**Faith Leaders Welcome House Introduction of John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act; Call for Immediate Passage**

*Sr. Quincy Howard: "Even as the urgency of restoring the VRA grows, bipartisan support to protect the freedom to vote has shamefully dwindled."*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This week, Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL) reintroduced H.R.4, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. The bill is expected to receive a vote on the House floor in the coming days. This legislation is named after the late Congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis, who risked his life for the right to vote. It would restore and modernize the 1965 Voting Rights Act and require preclearance on a nationwide scale for practices that disproportionately affect communities of color. This legislation is a critical second part to the faith community's democracy agenda along with the For the People Act, which is currently blocked by the Republican filibuster in the Senate.

Six voting and election administration practices with significant evidence of discriminatory impact are detailed in a recently released [124-page report](#) from the House Administration Committee Subcommittee on Elections. The subcommittee identified these practices after conducting five investigatory hearings with more than 35 witnesses during the 117th Congress. In light of these modern threats to voting rights, faith leaders welcomed the introduction of H.R.4 and called for its immediate passage in the House, saying:

**Sister Quincy Howard, OP, Coordinating Director, Faithful Democracy Coalition:**

"As a person of faith, I believe the freedom to vote rightfully belongs to all citizens and is our most direct means of creating a better world in a democratic society. Passage of the VRA of 1965 was a critical step in affirming the right to vote and curbing attempts to restrict voter participation by communities of color.

In the eight years since the *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling we have ample evidence that voter suppression tactics are rising sharply and the recent *Brnovich v. DNC* ruling further emboldens discriminatory voting practices. Even as the urgency of restoring the VRA grows, bipartisan support to protect the freedom to vote has shamefully dwindled. In addition, newly released census data revealing an increasingly diverse nation means that Congress must move quickly to pass H.R.4, or the most extreme versions of gerrymandering may create a racist political landscape for the next decade."

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*[The Faithful Democracy Coalition](#) is an interfaith coalition of national congregations and faith-based organizations that educate and advocate for federal reforms to strengthen our democracy.*



## ***Faith Leaders Call on Congress to Restore the Voting Rights Act NOW***

*The Leadership Conference of Women Religious is deeply concerned about the state of our nation and the future of our democracy. As women of faith and faithful Americans, we believe that all people have the right and obligation to participate fully in our democracy, including the freedom to freely exercise their sacred right to vote. Our sisters and brothers struggled to secure the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It falls to us to continue their work today.*

*Pope Francis reminds us that our vocation is inherently political: "Authentic faith always involves a deep desire to change the world.... We cannot remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice." As Catholic sisters committed to serving the common good and helping to build a more perfect union, we urge members of the U.S. House of Representative to pass H.R. 4, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.*

***– Sister Carol Zinn, SSJ, Executive Director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious***

*Voting is a sacred right and the foundation of democracy that upholds human dignity. We desperately need to protect every American's freedom to vote -- and right now this freedom is endangered by the same faction that defended Jim Crow. Our spiritual ancestors in the Civil Rights Movement passed the Voting Rights Act despite fierce opposition from white supremacists. We come together now across race and place to demand that Congress pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4).*

***–Rev. Dr. Jennifer Butler, CEO, Faith in Public Life***

*As Reform Jews, our teachings motivate our advocacy to protect voting rights and fight voter suppression. Rabbi Yitzhak taught, "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted," (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a). Diminished federal voter protections and new anti-voter laws undermine the ability of all people, particularly Communities of Color, to participate in our democracy. It is time for Congress to restore those protections and pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4). Our faith's commitment to political participation demands that Congress pass this bill as an important step towards ensuring that the whole community is represented.*

***–Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism***



*We stand on the shoulders of so many in our nation who have shown courage and resistance to realize their right to vote, who have fought tirelessly to make sure America lives up to its full potential. Voting is a crucial part of what we must do to hold our elected officials—to hold America—accountable to not just the dream that Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. laid out for us, but also the promise that America has held since its beginnings. Yes, it's a promise historically marred by injustice, but it is the promise of a better way. It is a sin and a shame to witness how voting rights have been suppressed and denied since 2013. Voting is a way that we claim the freedom that we have in America. Our most urgent request to Congress is the same as that made by MLK over 40 years ago: give us the ballot.*

**–Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune, Chief Operating Officer, National Council of Churches**

*By our own admission, within our most precious documents, we acknowledge that ALL people are part of God's creation and that we are one nation under God. As such, our democracy says that every citizen should be respected regardless of sex, race, national origin, etc. and that the government is accountable to defend and protect the rights of its public, its citizens. The most precious nature of American society is the right to vote. We have the dignity of citizenship rights; laws are necessary to defend that dignity and those rights, unobstructed, so citizens can enjoy voting and electing their officials.*

**–Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef, USAF-Retired, President, Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque**

*The United Methodist Church affirms the critical role of governments in protecting the rights of all people to free and fair elections. In particular, the Church supports efforts to dismantle policies and practices that disenfranchise communities of color and perpetuate systemic injustice.”*

**–Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church**

*The Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) faith was founded on the belief in the equality of all. Voter suppression in the United States violates this central belief and we must work to assure everyone has the right to vote. We call on lawmakers across the nation to take a stand against voter suppression and pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4).*

**–Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation**



*The requirement of society to provide human dignity for all, which stands at the root of all theological traditions, strikes a blow at the very heart of the spurious arguments made by those who want to prevent others from voting based on age, race, disability, or history of contact with the criminal justice system. As an organization that works with many who come from communities that have been historically subjected to all forms of discrimination, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture believes that the right to vote and to fully participate in the democracy is a sacred right and one that should never be taken away from anyone, for any reason.*

**–Rev. Dr. Ron Stief, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture**

*Since voting is so fundamental to our democracy, all citizens should be committed to making it possible for everyone to exercise that right. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4) is critical to having a genuine representative democracy and to make sure that the most vulnerable populations are not disenfranchised from the democratic process. People of faith are concerned that the voice of the people be truly representative of all the people.*

**–Bishop John Stowe, Bishop-President, Pax Christi USA**

*At National Council of Jewish Women, we are guided by the Jewish imperative to pursue tzedek, or justice. For justice to be realized, all eligible voters must have an opportunity to participate in the electoral process. Without access to the ballot, we can't elect lawmakers who represent our communities and our needs. Congress must restore the full strength of the Voting Rights Act without delay.*

**–Sheila Katz, CEO, National Council of Jewish Women**

*It was when the collective voice of the people cried out to the Lord in Exodus 3:9 that God heard and sent deliverance to the Nation of Israel! Voting by the oppressed was the way Black Americans could lift up their voices, cry out, and participate in creating a more just nation! Restoration of the Voting Rights Act so all voices are heard is essential to perfecting this nation and assuring that it does not return to a separate and unequal society!*

**–Rev. Reuben D. Eckels, Church World Service (CWS)**



*The right to vote without any impediments or obstructions is one of the most basic privileges of our democracy belonging to all age-eligible American citizens regardless of race, religion, or gender orientation. I call upon our Senate and House to protect this sacred right which is critical for the defense of all our other rights and privileges.*

***–Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Haggray, American Baptist Home Mission Societies***

*The Gospels say we are measured by what we have done for those in poverty, those discriminated against, the vulnerable, those whom society has made powerless, excluded, and disenfranchised. Christians inspired by the life of St. Francis are particularly charged to heed this Gospel message. Yet, today that Gospel message is threatened by state laws seeking in subtle and not so subtle ways to deter the impoverished and marginalized from voting. Federal legislation is needed to address these shameful challenges. Therefore, we must immediately call on Congress to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4): an important “bookend” piece of legislation that will help ensure that all Americans have equal access to the vote.*

***–Stephen Schneck, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network***

*In the Bible, we are reminded that “when justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous” (Proverbs 21:15). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) understands that justice is done when we live out our mutual responsibility for one another by guaranteeing our neighbor’s right to vote and participate freely and fully in society. In 2013, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, our denomination’s highest legislative authority, adopted a social policy resolution titled Voting Rights to All Citizens. This resolution calls us to express concern for our nation’s history of voter suppression from the Jim Crow era to the current climate of restrictive voter laws that create barriers to many people of color in their right to vote. This resolution calls on all parts of this church to “promote public life worthy of the name” by speaking out as advocates and engaging in local efforts such as voter registration and supporting legislation to guarantee the right to vote to all citizens. We support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4) as a key step in ensuring the voices of all citizens will be safeguarded and heard. Its provisions would help reinstate guidelines that ensure protection through oversight and combat voter suppression.*

***–Rev. Amy Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America***



*It is clearer than ever today that democracy is a process, not a static state. Democracy requires care, investment, and vigilance to ensure all voices are represented. The shameful history of racism in U.S. voting systems is not over, and new approaches designed to restrict certain communities' access to a free and fair vote cannot be tolerated. The federal government must act now to reinstate and expand protections of voting rights for all people.*

**–Joyce Ajlouny, General Secretary, American Friends Service Committee**

*The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been a long-time advocate for voting rights. We were deeply dismayed by the actions of the Supreme Court to void Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. This decision left many people of color vulnerable to discriminatory voting laws that have historically plagued communities of color. Voting is our right as U.S. citizens. Taking away or restricting one's ability to exercise their voice at the polls is not only immoral; it is unconstitutional. The actions of many states in passing extremely restrictive voting laws are unjust and must be addressed. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Congress must stand on the side of justice and restore the Voting Rights Act.*

**–Rev. Jimmie R. Hawkins, Director of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness**

*Voting is at the heart of the democratic process. It is a fundamental access point for individuals to have a voice in the public policy decision making process that can shape the future of our local, regional and global collective life. As people of faith, we believe every vote is a voice, and every voice counts. The right to vote is a national value that transcends partisanship. It goes beyond political party identification to our core values as a nation and the centrality of a citizen's free vote, not limited by the powers of money, social class and unequal access to voting. It is imperative that we pass a fix for the damage done by the Supreme Court Shelby decision by restoring voter protections.*

**–Sandra Sorensen, Director of Washington Office, United Church of Christ (UCC)**



*The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd calls on Congress to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4). We have seen increasing hostility to full voting rights for all Americans since the U.S. Supreme Court partially struck down the Voting Rights Act. We have seen new barriers put up to restrict the number of voters of color, suppressing the full American voice and skewing our response to important civil and human rights issues in need of our attention. As people of faith, we are called to liberate the oppressed and marginalized. Please restore the vote.*

**–Lawrence E. Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd**

*American Baptist Churches, USA have officially advocated for voter rights for many decades and we continue "...to declare the right to vote to be a basic human right, and support programs and measures to assure this right. The right of citizenship in a nation, to participate in the political process, to form political parties, to have a voice in decisions made in the political arena are basic undeniable human rights. The Bible teaches us that all humanity is created in God's image and that we are all valuable in God's sight."*

**– Dr. C. Jeff Woods, Acting General Secretary, American Baptist Churches, USA**

*People have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all persons, especially the poor and vulnerable. Voter suppression laws strike at this tenet of Catholic Social Teaching by denying that right to those who are disproportionately poor, especially African American, Native American and Hispanic American communities. As faithful citizens of every faith and humanitarian tradition, we affirm our common responsibility to promote the dignity of every person and to work for justice and the common good. That can only happen if we are all afforded the basic right to vote and to participate fully in our democratic process.*

**–Scott Wright, Director, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach**



*We are the church, the body of Christ in this world, at this time. We need to stop the racist suppression of the votes of people of color. Denying people their right to vote is counter to the will of God. This is especially true when rich and powerful interests seek to deny people who have been historically marginalized from shaping our society. We need to change our policies and our laws to make voting a concrete reality for all of God's children.*

**–Rev. Ms. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Executive Minister, Alliance of Baptists**

*As Unitarian Universalists, our 5th Principle affirms “the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large”. Therefore, we advocate for restoration of full protections under the Voting Rights Act. When our democracy is in peril, so too are our civil rights. Racial discrimination and voter suppression are on the rise—an unacceptable circumstance to freedom-loving citizens of the United States and one that our faith calls us to confront. The pernicious impacts of the Shelby ruling must be reversed.*

*As the leader of a faith-based education, witness and advocacy organization, I know that issues like poverty, immigration, climate change, and rising inequity in our society cannot improve unless we defend the basic tenets of our democracy. Our democracy works best when everyone can fully participate. Congress should strive to make our elections more free, more fair and more accessible. The more Americans who participate in our elections, the better our democracy reflects who we are as a country and the better we can meet the complex challenges of our times.*

**–Pablo DeJesús, Executive Director, Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ)**

*The Disciples Center for Public Witness fully supports the Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4). This legislation is critically needed because of the discriminatory preclearance voting requirements that have proliferated across the United States of America since the Supreme Court’s 2013 Shelby County v. Holder decision. Shelby County invalidated the preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). Since 2013, voter suppression tactics such as voter purging and restrictive identification practices have been used to target black and brown communities. As a pro reconciling/antiracist church, we oppose voter suppression against all people, especially people of color. The success of our democracy requires that every citizen have the ability to cast their ballot. The Voting Rights Advancement Act will help ensure equal access to the electoral process.*

**–Rev. Beverly Goines, Ph.D., Associate Director, Disciples Center for Public Witness  
(Christian Church Disciples of Christ)**