



Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

1629 K Street, NW
10th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20006

Phone: 202-466-3311
Fax: 202-466-3435
www.civilrights.org

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A. Philip Randolph*
Roy Wilkins*

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May 3, 2006

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
2449 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4905

Dear Chairman Sensenbrenner,

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, we write to express our strong support for H.R. 9, The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006. LCCR deeply appreciates your leadership and the leadership of Representatives John Conyers (D-MI) and Mel Watt (D-NC) in sponsoring this important legislation. H.R. 9 is critical to ensuring the continued protection of the right to vote for all Americans.

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) is considered by many to be our nation's most effective civil rights law. Congress enacted the VRA in direct response to evidence of significant and pervasive discrimination taking place across the country, including the use of literacy tests, poll taxes, intimidation, threats, and violence. By outlawing the tests and devices that prevented minorities from voting, the VRA put teeth into the 15th Amendment's guarantee that no citizen can be denied the right to vote because of the color of his or her skin. The VRA was initially passed in 1965 and has been renewed four times by bipartisan majorities in the U.S. House, and signed into law by both Republican and Democratic presidents. In the 41 years since its initial passage, the VRA has enfranchised millions of racial, ethnic, and language minority citizens by eliminating discriminatory practices and removing other barriers to their political participation. In doing so, the VRA has empowered minority voters and has helped to desegregate legislative bodies at all levels of government.

Throughout the 109th Congress, during ten oversight hearings that considered the ongoing need for the VRA, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution found significant evidence that barriers to equal minority voter participation remain. The oversight hearings examined three of the VRA's key provisions that are set to expire in August of 2007: Section 5, which requires that certain jurisdictions with a history of discrimination in voting obtain federal approval prior to making any changes affecting voting, thus preventing the implementation of discriminatory practices; Section 203, which requires certain jurisdictions to provide language assistance to citizens who are



limited-English proficient; and Sections 6 through 9, which authorize the federal government to send observers to monitor elections for compliance with the VRA.

The evidence gathered by the subcommittee revealed continuing and persistent discrimination in jurisdictions covered by Section 5 and Section 203 of the VRA. The oversight hearings found that a second generation of discrimination has emerged that serves to abridge or deny minorities their equal voting rights. Jurisdictions continue to attempt to implement discriminatory electoral procedures on matters such as methods of election, annexations, and polling place changes, as well as through redistricting conducted with the purpose or the effect of denying minorities equal access to the political process. Likewise, the oversight hearings demonstrated that citizens are often denied access to VRA-mandated language assistance and, as a result, the opportunity to cast an informed ballot.

H.R. 9 is a direct response to the evidence of discrimination that was gathered by the subcommittee. It addresses this compelling record by renewing the VRA's temporary provisions for 25 years. The bill reauthorizes and restores Section 5 to its original congressional intent, which has been undermined by the Supreme Court in *Reno v. Bossier Parish II* and *Georgia v. Ashcroft*. The *Bossier* fix restores the ability of the Attorney General, under Section 5 of the Act, to block implementation of voting changes motivated by a discriminatory purpose. The *Georgia* fix clarifies that Section 5 is intended to protect the ability of minority citizens to elect their candidates of choice. Section 203 is being renewed to continue to provide language-minority citizens with equal access to voting, using more frequently-updated coverage determinations based on the American Community Survey Census data. The bill also keeps the federal observer provisions in place, and authorizes recovery of expert witness fees in lawsuits brought to enforce the VRA.

The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy and the VRA provides the legal basis to protect this right for all Americans. We know that you are committed to timely Congressional action to renew and restore this vital law and we commend you for your leadership in introducing and sponsoring The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006. If you or your staff has any further questions, please feel free to contact Nancy Zirkin, LCCR Deputy Director, or Julie Fernandes, LCCR Senior Counsel, at (202) 466-3311.

Sincerely,

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

A. Phillip Randolph Institute
AARP
Advancement Project
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Federation of Government Employees



American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Foundation for the Blind
American Jewish Committee
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Americans for Democratic Action
Anti-Defamation League
Asian American Justice Center
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
Center for Civic Participation
Common Cause
Community Service Society
Dēmos: A Network of Ideas and Action
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
FairVote
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Feminist Majority
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Gamaliel National Clergy Caucus
Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Human Rights Campaign
International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies
Japanese American Citizens League
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Labor Committee
Korean American Resource and Cultural Center (KRCC)
Korean Resource Center (KRC)
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of United Latin American Citizens
League of Women Voters of the United States
Legal Momentum
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc
National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Association of Human Rights Workers
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund
National Association of Neighborhoods
National Association of Social Workers
National Community Reinvestment Coalition
National Congress of American Indians



National Congress of Black Women
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Council of Negro Women, Inc.
National Education Association
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce
National Institute for Latino Policy
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Organization for Women (NOW)
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Puerto Rican Coalition
National Urban League
National Voting Rights Institute
National Women's Law Center
Native American Rights Fund
NETWORK: A Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Organization of Chinese Americans
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National
People For the American Way
Poverty & Race Research Action Council
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Project Equality
Protestants for the Common Good
Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund
RainbowPUSH
Service Employees International Union
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project
The Interfaith Alliance
The Massachusetts Latino Political Organization
The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Auto Workers
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Steelworkers
William C. Velasquez Institute
YKASEC - Empowering the Korean American Community
YWCA USA