

DEMOCRACY AWAKENING 2016

VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Voter discrimination is a major problem in American elections. The Supreme Court said so in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which struck down part of the Voting Rights Act. "Voting discrimination still exists; no one doubts that," wrote Chief Justice Roberts. The Court's decision in *Shelby County* left it to Congress to update the law to address voting discrimination in the 21st century. The **Voting Rights Advancement Act** (Advancement Act) (H.R. 2867 / S. 1659) answers that call to action by replacing what the VRA lost through *Shelby County* and by making additional, critical updates.

The bill has received broad and vocal support from the civil rights community because it responds to the unique challenges of voting discrimination as they have evolved in the 50 years since the Voting Rights Act first passed. The Advancement Act recognizes that changing demographics require tools that protect voters nationwide – especially voters of color, voters who rely on languages other than English, and voters with disabilities. It also requires that jurisdictions make voting changes public and transparent.

The Advancement Act will:

- **Modernize the formula used to cover states with a pattern of discrimination that puts voters at risk:** The Advancement Act will require 13 states with a recent history of voting rights violations, including New York and California, to have all voting changes examined ("precleared" or "preclearance") prior to implementation. Preclearance would be lifted after 10 years for states and local jurisdictions without violations.
- **Ensure that last-minute voting changes won't adversely affect voters:** Communities have a right to know about voting changes that affect them. To put an end to last-minute changes to election laws or procedures that may adversely impact voters, the Advancement Act requires that jurisdictions publicly notice all changes to voting laws that happen within 180 days before an election.
- **Protect voters nationwide from changes that are likely to discriminate against people of color and language minorities:** The Advancement Act will require preclearance for certain new voting procedures in all jurisdictions, including: adding or subtracting seats that affect the influence of communities of color; reduction in language accessibility of voting materials; addition of new barriers to voter registration and verification; and consolidation or relocation of polling places.
- **Enhance the ability to apply additional preclearance review when needed:** The Advancement Act will allow a federal court the discretion to order a preclearance remedy following any violation of the Act.
- **Expand federal observer program:** The Attorney General will be able to send federal observers to any place she determines to have a substantial risk of racial discrimination.
- **Improve Voting Rights Protections for Native Americans and Alaska Natives.** Among other things, the bill will offer greater access for voter registration and voting on and off reservations, and greater language accessibility.

Unless Congress acts, voters in 2016 will face the first presidential election in 50 years without strong protections in federal law to combat racial and ethnic discrimination. The proud civil rights legacy of the Voting Rights Act is in danger. **Congress must come together and restore the protections that voters in this country deserve.**

GET INVOLVED

We need your voice in this movement. As of April 5, 158 Representatives and 43 Senators have joined Representative Sewell and Senator Leahy on the Advancement Act. If you are not yet among them, contact Cachavious English in Representative Sewell's office regarding H.R. 2867 or Josh Hsu in Senator Leahy's Judiciary Committee office regarding S. 1659.