

August 2, 2017

Chairman Bob Goodlatte
2309 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Goodlatte,

The undersigned coalition of civil rights, social justice, religious, and nontheistic advocacy organizations urge you to co-sponsor and support the passage of the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017 (VRAA), also known as H. R. 3239. This bipartisan bill, which was introduced by Reps. Conyers and Sensenbrenner, has 72 co-sponsors, including 65 Democrats and 7 Republicans.

Attacks on the ability of American citizens to vote are jeopardizing the health of our democratic system and have disenfranchised countless Americans who simply seek to express their democratic rights.

For example, the recent *Shelby County vs. Holder* case has effectively neutered the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) by invalidating the pre-clearance formula within the law which determines which states and localities have to clear changes to voting policies and laws with the U.S. Attorney General or a federal court. The VRA mandated that these localities get changes to voting policies approved by the Attorney General or the courts because these places were some of the worst offenders in the Jim Crow-era when it came to discriminating against marginalized communities regarding their right to vote. These were the places which introduced poll taxes, which allocated less voting stations in black neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods, and permitted violence against minority communities who attempted to vote.

The Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017 will fix this problem by using a new formula to determine which states and localities are subject to pre-clearance. This formula has been specifically designed to comply with the Court's recent ruling on the Voting Rights Act, and takes into account the Court's concerns about the scope and applicability of the pre-clearance formula.

This legislation is sorely needed to prevent voter disenfranchisement and to ensure that all eligible American citizens are able to utilize their democratic rights. Numerous discriminatory voting restriction bills are being introduced in state legislatures, and while many of these bills are held up by the courts after they become law, they still have the potential to disenfranchise millions of Americans who simply wish to express their democratic right to vote. By passing the VRAA, you will help ensure that one of the most fundamental of rights, that of the people to determine who will represent them in government, is protected for generations.

Sincerely,

American Atheists

American Humanist Association

Center for Freethought Equality

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Franciscan Action Network

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Office of Public Witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Secular Student Alliance

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association