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Michael Sheetz, President

January 14, 2022

Dear Senator,

On behalf of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League), we write to urge you to support the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act, which is a combination of the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. This legislation is fittingly named after Congressman John Lewis, who spent his entire life fighting to ensure equality and the right to vote for all Americans.

ADL is a leading anti-hate organization and has been working to secure justice and fair treatment for all since its founding in 1913. ADL is devoted to ensuring that all Americans have a voice in our democracy, opposing efforts to restrict the freedom to vote and establish deliberate barriers to voting such as photo ID laws, partisan and racial gerrymandering, efforts to limit vote-by-mail and ballot drop boxes, and more. ADL has championed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) since before its passage in 1965, and long recognized it as one of the most important and effective pieces of civil rights legislation ever passed.

This bill comes before you at a critical time for our democracy, when Supreme Court decisions have eroded decades of protections against racial discrimination in elections and states across the country are enacting anti-voter laws designed to sabotage elections and silence voters' voices, particularly for communities of color. In 2013, the Supreme Court invalidated a core part of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder* – a decision that has opened the door to the enactment of harmful, unnecessarily restrictive voting laws that have disproportionately affected marginalized communities, low-income persons, elderly Americans, and students. These laws undermine fair representation and run counter to the 15th Amendment's guarantee of equal voting rights.

In addition, last year the Supreme Court ruled in *Brnovich v. DNC* that the VRA did not bar Arizona lawmakers from limiting voters' access to the ballot, even though the Arizona legislation disproportionately affected Black and brown voters, Native American voters, students, and low-income voters. This decision set a dangerous new precedent for restrictive laws in other states. Enactment of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, as incorporated in the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act, will be critical to preventing states from instituting additional measures to suppress the vote in a discriminatory way. This bill would establish a new formula for determining when federal oversight is necessary to prevent such voting restrictions and require all states to publicly disclose any new changes to voting practices. By requiring all states to disclose any changes to voting practices, the legislation would promote ballot access and help ensure that all voters understand where and how to cast their ballot.

In addition to the racially discriminatory anti-voter laws that have been enacted in states across the country following the *Shelby County* decision and its progeny, over the past year many states have also pursued new laws to interfere in the nonpartisan administration of elections. According to an analysis by the [Brennan Center for Justice](#), in 2021 legislators in seven states introduced bills that would directly empower partisan officials to change or overturn election results, and at least three states have passed, and at least 10 more have considered, bills that would allow political partisans to seize control of certain aspects of election administration typically handled by professional election personnel. This unprecedented attack on the cornerstone of our democracy – free and fair elections – warrants urgent action.

The Freedom to Vote Act would address many of the harms caused by these new state laws by increasing access to the polls through expanded opportunities to vote early or by mail, by providing for automatic voter registration and same-day registration, and restoring the right to vote for individuals who were previously incarcerated. This bill would also address some of the most urgent threats to the free and fair administration of elections by protecting against voter intimidation, limiting the ability of state legislatures to engage in partisan gerrymandering, and increasing transparency of money in politics.

When our election processes are free, fair, and accessible, Americans make their voices heard. During our most recent election in 2020, expanded vote-by-mail, drop boxes, and more opportunities enabled record numbers of Americans to cast their ballots, despite a global pandemic and laws making it more difficult to vote in some jurisdictions, particularly for members of marginalized communities. However, cases like *Brnovich v. DNC* and *Shelby County v. Holder*, and countless other measures to deliberately erect barriers to voting, continue to endanger the right to vote for many Americans. Passing the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act can help enforce the constitutional prohibition on racial discrimination in voting and protect civil rights for all Americans.

The right to vote is fundamental to American democracy and should never be abridged on the basis of race, ethnicity, or any other protected factor. Passing the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act will bolster the foundation of our democracy and protect equal voting rights for all. I hope you will honor John Lewis's legacy and dedication to justice for all by standing against discriminatory restrictions on the right to vote and by voting to pass this crucial legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chelsea", is placed over a light blue rectangular background.

Chelsea Parsons
Director of Government Relations, Civil Rights