

September 16, 2015

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the undersigned LGBTQ and allied organizations, we urge you to co-sponsor the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (HR. 2867; S. 1659). This bill is essential in our collective efforts to restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) and to ensure that all eligible voters are able to participate fully in our democracy, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) voters. The passage of the VRAA will create constitutionally sound policies to protect eligible voters from tactics designed to restrict their voting access.

It is without question that voting rights are a fundamental and essential component of participating in the U.S. democracy. But, over the course of our history as a nation, voting rights have been a political battleground intended to silence the voice of minority populations. This summer marks the 50th anniversary of the VRA's passage and voter suppression tactics continue to emerge that restrict eligible voters from accessing the polls and exercising their civic duty. Following the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, the hard-won protections in the VRA were stripped of necessary protections and oversight.

To be clear, voting rights are an LGBTQ issue. We know that LGBTQ people come from all backgrounds and that—compared to the general population—members of the LGBTQ community are far more likely to identify as people of color, to have a disability, to live in poverty, to experience homelessness, or to come into contact with the criminal justice system. Moreover, LGBTQ people, particularly transgender and gender nonconforming people are far more likely to lack valid photo ID due to the patchwork of discriminatory laws that regulate name and gender change.

The current state of voting rights is appalling. In the last five years, we have seen a resurgence of laws/policies introduced at the state and local level to restrict the voting access of eligible voters. These laws have an adverse impact on certain voters, such as people of color, people with disabilities, people with low income or limited financial access, people who are experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ people, women, students, older adults, and people with prior felony convictions. These laws/policies are barriers for eligible voters seeking to exercise their civic duty.

The Voting Rights Advancement Act will restore the necessary protections of the VRA. It will respond to the unique challenge of voter discrimination practices that have evolved over the last 50 years, including modernizing the Federal preclearance formula to cover states with a history of voter discrimination and strengthening the ability of the courts to protect citizens from discriminatory voting practices, whether intended or not. It also requires districts to publicly disclose changes and information related to voting in the district and expands the federal

observer program so that federal observers can continue to keep voters safe from discrimination and harassment.

We urge you to stand in support of the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015. Your co-sponsorship of this legislation serves as a recognition that enacting protections for voting rights is an essential part of building a healthy democracy. To sign on as a co-sponsor in the Senate, please contact Senator Leahy's Senior Counsel Josh Hsu at Josh_Hsu@judiciary-dem.senate.gov. To sign on as a co-sponsor in the House, please contact Representative Sewell's Legislative Director Cachavious English at cachavious.english@mail.house.gov.

Now more than ever, it is important to ensure that the protections of the VRA are restored. Thank you for your consideration of the VRAA.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Advocates for Youth
AIDS United
American Civil Liberties Union
Athlete Ally
Believe Out Loud
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
BiLaw
BiNet USA
Bisexual Resource Center
Center for Black Equity, Inc.
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
COLAGE
Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals
DC Vote
Demos
Equality Federation
Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement
Family Equality Council
Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)
GLAAD
Global Justice Institute
GLSEN
Harvey Milk Foundation
Human Rights Campaign
Keshet
Lambda Legal

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Marriage Equality USA
Metropolitan Community Churches
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC)
National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)
National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)
National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)
National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC)
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH)
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
NMAC
Out & Equal Workplace Advocates
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Pride at Work
Project Vote
RAD Remedy
The National Council on Independent Living
The Trevor Project
Trans People of Color Coalition
True Colors Fund

State-level Organizations

AIDS Alabama
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR)
Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition
Equality California
Equality Michigan
Equality New Mexico
Garden State Equality
Georgia Equality
Massachusetts Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Youth
New Voices for Reproductive Justice
One Colorado
Phoenix Pride LGBT Center
Tennessee Equality Project

Local-level Organizations

AIDS Action Baltimore
Bay Area Bisexual Network
Bi Local Advocating and Raising Visibility for Central Ohio's Bi/Pan/Queer Community
Bisexual Queer Alliance Chicago
Blue Ridge Pride Center
Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center (Allentown, PA)
Cape Fear Equality
Chinese Progressive Association - Boston
Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce
Dreams of Hope
GLBT Alliance of Santa Cruz County, California
Harlem Pride, Inc.
Hispanic Black Gay Coalition
Initiative for Transgender Leadership
Kalamazoo Gay Lesbian Resource Center
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, NYC
LGBT Center of Central PA
LGBT Center of Raleigh
LGBT Community Center of the Desert
Los Angeles LGBT Center
MDGLCCFOUNDATION
Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center
Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, Inc.
Multicultural AIDS Coalition, Inc.
New York City Anti-Violence Project
PFLAG Columbia-Howard County, MD
PFLAG Oregon Central Coast
Pridelines
Queer Asian Pacific-Islander Alliance (QAPA)
Resource Center
San Diego LGBT Community Center
SisterReach
The DC Center for the LGBT Community
The Montrose Center
The Network/La Red
The Theater Offensive
THRIVE Southwest PA
Triangle Community Center