



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, August 5th, 2024

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LDF Commemorates the 59th Anniversary of the Historic Passage of the Voting Rights Act

Today marks the 59th anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on August 6, 1965. Hailed as one of the most critical civil rights laws ever passed, the VRA mandated the promise of equal voting rights in the United States into law, enacting critical protections to combat discriminatory voting practices that long disenfranchised Black communities and other communities of color. Since its founding in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) has been a leader in the fight to safeguard the rights of Black voters, and played a critical role in the passage of the VRA.

LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson issued the following statement:

“In marking the historic passage of the Voting Rights Act 59 years ago today, we honor and celebrate the courage, sacrifice, and tenacity of the fearless individuals who led the charge for an inclusive democracy. In unified calls for justice and change, from across the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama to the halls of our nation’s legal chambers, those undaunted souls advocated for fair and full access to the ballot box for all Americans. The seminal legislation of the VRA that arose from their efforts decisively transformed our nation and marked a significant milestone in our journey as a burgeoning multiracial democracy—largely alleviating widespread voter disenfranchisement and empowering millions of Black people and other people of color to register to vote.

“Today is also a reminder that we have a long way to go in this fight. As Black communities face the most pervasive, rampant voter disenfranchisement in decades, the urgency of this current moment cannot be overstated. We must rise to confront the present-day challenges that aim to threaten our democracy. In a post-*Shelby County* electoral landscape, discriminatory voting policies have substantially increased across the country, and Congress has yet to restore and strengthen the VRA’s full protections. Several states, including New York, Connecticut, and Minnesota, have met the current moment by passing state voting rights acts that safeguard voters’ fundamental protections. We implore our nation’s legislative leaders to guarantee voting access to

every American by implementing legislation, state and federal level, that will affirm our constitutional ideals.

“Protecting the right to vote has been a core mission of LDF since its founding. LDF carries a rich, storied history in safeguarding the rights of Black voters to fully participate and be represented in the political process. Today, we launched Black Voters on the Rise (BVOTR), an initiative aimed to provide nonpartisan voter education and build Black political power, empowering communities to learn, build, and participate in the democratic process. Voting is one of the most impactful ways to participate in our democracy. As the upcoming election approaches, it is imperative that every one of us engages in the process and exercises this fundamental right.

“Together as community members, civic leaders, and advocates, we must reaffirm our commitment to ensuring full and fair access to the ballot box. We must work to strengthen and perfect our nation’s multiracial democracy until every citizen is fully and fairly served by our nation’s promise of just and equal electoral access.”

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Founded in 1940, the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) is the nation’s first civil rights law organization. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.