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**CIVIL RIGHTS COALITION AND CONNECTICUT LEGISLATORS JOIN
TOGETHER IN CALLING FOR PASSAGE OF VOTING RIGHTS BILL S.B. 471**

HARTFORD, CT - Today, lawmakers from the Connecticut legislature as well as civil rights groups in the state joined together for a press conference urging for the passage of SB 471, a voting rights act for the State of Connecticut, before the end of the legislative session. With the passage of SB 471, Connecticut would join California, Oregon, Washington, and Virginia as states with their own voting rights act that bolster protections from discriminatory rules that infringe upon citizens' right to vote.

In addition to today's press conference, over 20 civil rights groups, including the ACLU of Connecticut, Common Cause in Connecticut, Hispanic Federation, LatinoJustice PRDLEF, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, [sent a letter](#) to the Connecticut legislature and Governor Ned Lamont urging them to pass and sign SB 471 into law.

"The right to vote should be fundamental, and the ballot must be accessible to every eligible voter, without barriers or intimidation," said **Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel for the ACLU of Connecticut**. "Connecticut has a long history as one of the worst states for voting rights in the country, especially for Black voters. It is long past time for our state to modernize its voting laws and eradicate discrimination at the ballot box, and the Connecticut Voting Rights Act would be a huge step toward achieving that goal."

"In the face of hundreds of laws coming up across the country that aim to dilute the power of non-white voters, it is crucial for us to reinforce voting rights in every state of our union," said **Fulvia Vargas-De León, Associate Counsel at LatinoJustice PRLDEF**. "LatinoJustice is committed to this work in Connecticut and in other states. By addressing issues such as inconvenient or insufficient polling locations, wrongful voter purges, lack of drop boxes, as well as decisions that result in longer lines during elections, the Connecticut Voting Rights Act will take on practices that create unjust barriers for people of color. We call on the Connecticut legislature to pass this law to protect the right to vote for all residents in the state."

"As a nonpartisan organization, the Hispanic Federation has worked for over three decades to ensure that Latinos are registered to vote and are informed about the political process, rights, and responsibilities," said **Yanidsi Velez, New England Regional Director of Hispanic Federation**. "In Connecticut, we have collaborated with our member agencies and community-based organizations to ensure Spanish-speaking voters are constantly engaged and their voter rights protected. Most recently, the Census data demonstrated that the growth of the Hispanic and Latino population is the most striking of any group in the state. Today more than ever, expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency is vital for our state's democracy. Spanish-speaking voters are not second-class citizens, and their voices must be heard in every election cycle. We highly encourage the legislature to uphold our

nation's democratic values and proceed with the passage of S.B. 471 to reinforce that every citizen in the state has the right to vote.”

“It will be nine long years in June since the Supreme Court gutted key provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act. In the absence of Senate action to fix the law, it’s time for the states to act instead,” said **Common Cause in Connecticut Executive Director Cheri Quickmire**. “For democracy to work for us all, it must include us all—no matter our race, age, background or zip code. By passing this bill, our General Assembly will ensure that every Connecticut voter’s freedom to vote is protected, even if U.S. senators continue to block action at the federal level.”

“This is a historic opportunity for Connecticut,” said **Steven Lance, Policy Counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.** “By passing SB 471, the Nutmeg State can turn the page on its discriminatory past, empower Black and brown voters to participate equally in our democracy, and show other states—and the federal government—what true leadership on voting rights looks like.”

“As voting rights are under attack across the country, I am proud that Connecticut is moving to ensure that our right to cast a ballot and make our voices heard is protected,” said **Secretary of the State Denise Merrill**. “Where Congress has failed to protect the fundamental right to vote, Connecticut will succeed, and the Connecticut Voting Rights Act is an important part of that effort.”

“A vote in Bristol should count as much and no less than a vote in New Haven or Norwich, said **State Senator Matthew Lesser**. “With long lines in some communities and voter intimidation in others, Connecticut can’t wait for Washington to pass a Voting Rights Act. We need to join other states and protect the right to vote at the state level. I’ve been the lead sponsor of the CT Voting Rights Act, along with NAACP LDF and a broad and growing coalition, because I know this bill will give Connecticut the strongest Voting Rights protections in America.”

“The right to vote is much-heralded as the cornerstone of our democracy,” said **State Representative Stephanie Thomas**. “Whether you like things just the way they are or would like to agitate for change, you must have fair and safe access to the ballot box. I am excited to see Connecticut looking for ways to ensure that all eligible voters are able to exercise their right to vote fairly and equitably. Raising SB 471 is a step in the right direction that will allow all voters to exercise their civic responsibility.”

“Voting rights are the foundation for all of the other rights we enjoy,” said **State Representative Cristin McCarthy Vahey**. “Preserving and expanding voter accessibility is critical to the effective functioning of our democracy.”

“At a time when many states are rolling back voting rights, I’m proud that Connecticut is pushing hard the other way,” said **State Senator Derek Slap**. “We must continue to enact reforms that ensure every eligible voter can exercise their constitutional right and have their voice count. This piece of legislation, along with initiatives for early voting and no excuse absentee ballots, are critical parts of our efforts to strengthen our democracy.”

“The federal Voting Rights Act was enacted to combat the long history of disenfranchisement and inequities embedded in our country’s democratic process. Once powerful legislation, this act has been weakened as states have passed policies eroding access to the ballot for marginalized communities. SB 471 takes the opposite approach to strengthen voter access in Connecticut and eliminate barriers voters of color, aging populations, and income constrained communities often face at the polls,” said **State Representative Corey Paris**.

“Voting rights for all is a fundamental component of upholding a working democracy. We must ensure that our elections are being conducted in a fair and just manner and that we protect every eligible voter in our state,” said **State Representative Hubert Delany**. “At a time where barriers are preventing so many voters around our country from casting their ballot, Connecticut has the opportunity to be a leader in dismantling a system that infringes voting rights. SB 471 will bring a new day for a stronger democracy.”

A short fact sheet about S.B. 471, An Act Concerning Elections & State Voting Rights is available [here](#).

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