

NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC.

H.R. 1

The For the People Act

H.R. 1, The For the People Act, is the first major bill of the 116th Congress. The bill contains critical reforms that promise to strengthen our democracy, including restoring voting rights in federal elections to individuals with a criminal background, impacting upwards of five million Americans, and prohibiting the use of deceptive practices and preventing voter intimidation.

Key voting rights provisions of H.R. 1:

- **Improve Access**-H.R. 1 expands access to the ballot box by removing barriers to voting. H.R. 1 creates automatic voter registration across the country; ensures that individuals who have completed felony sentences have their full voting rights restored; expands early voting and simplifies absentee voting; and modernizes the U.S voting system.
- **Promotes Integrity**-H.R. 1 commits Congress to build a record necessary to restore the Voting Rights Act; prohibits unfair voter roll purges; and ends partisan gerrymandering.
- **Ensure Security**-H.R. 1 ensures that our nation's elections are decided by voters without interference by enhancing federal support for voting system security, particularly paper ballots; increasing oversight over election vendors; and requiring the development of a national strategy to protect U.S. democratic institutions.

The introduction and passage of HR 1 also begins a larger legislative effort to restore the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) to its full strength following a disastrous 2013 Supreme Court decision, *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*, which gutted a key provision of the Act known as Section 5.

Section 5 required certain jurisdictions with a record of chronic racial discrimination in voting to submit all proposed voting changes to the US Department of Justice or a federal court in Washington, DC. At its pre-*Shelby* strength, Section 5 would have prevented some of the voter suppression schemes that we have encountered over the past five years, including many that received national exposure most recently in the 2018 midterm elections.

HR 1 calls for “Congress to conduct investigatory and evidentiary hearings to determine the legislation necessary to restore the Voting Rights Act and combat continuing efforts in America that suppress the free exercise of the franchise in communities of color.”

Discrimination against Black voters is an overwhelming and growing problem that demands immediate legislative action. The need for H.R. 1 and the full restoration of the VRA is evident from what we are seeing on the ground, most recently in the 2018 midterm elections, including additional burdens placed on voters, particularly Black and Latino voters, by closing voting precincts and purging over half a million people from the voter rolls; malfunctioning voting machines, long lines and wait times, changes to precincts with insufficient notice, and an overreliance on provisional ballots; inadequate early voting sites; and ` in states with voter ID laws, the disenfranchising effects of the laws on economically under-resourced communities of color, made worse by the confusion and inefficiencies such laws tend to cause at the polls, such as improperly rejecting voters who had valid photo IDs.