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Civil Rights Groups Call on Senate to Take Immediate Action on Voting Rights

WASHINGTON — Leading civil rights organizations released the following joint statement urging senators to be on the right side of history and pass the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act:

“History will judge senators for what they do to protect voting rights, not arcane rules. The Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act will ensure that voters across the country can safely and freely cast their ballots. Every senator who chooses obstruction over protecting our freedom to vote is contributing to the fall of our democracy. Their legacies and our legacy as a country are on the line. Senators are elected to vote, not hide behind procedural rules while our voting rights are under attack. Sham excuses are unacceptable.

“The right to vote is our most fundamental right and is the right upon which all our other rights rest. People have died to achieve and protect this precious right. Democracy cannot exist without all of our participation. We cannot tolerate barriers to voting for people of color, veterans, people with disabilities, rural voters, new Americans, senior citizens, or young people. We cannot tolerate efforts to remove local election officials or harass them to prevent them from counting every vote. Instead, we must move forward and protect the voice and vote of every American.

“We are especially disappointed in senators of both parties who have supported amending the Senate rules for economic matters, but are unwilling to do so for the most critical matter facing our nation: the protection of the right to vote. These senators are either misguided or disingenuous in their motivations. We are also disappointed in senators who have supported voting rights legislation in the past, but who refuse to do so now out of fear of political retribution from cynical party leadership. History will judge them for it, as it has judged others who have sat idly by as civil rights have been abridged. They will be viewed with as much disdain as those who have actively sought to abridge civil rights. In the tradition of those civil rights giants who fought for voting rights before us, we ask those senators: ‘which side are you on, senator, which side are you on?’

“As we approach Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we will not accept empty promises in pursuit of Dr. King’s dream for a more equal and just America. Our leaders have a historic opportunity to restore and protect Dr. King’s legacy by passing the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act.

“The Senate must act by any means necessary to pass the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act so that every vote counts and we all have a say in our future. This legislation addresses some of the major problems facing our democracy by restoring the power of the Voting Rights Act, setting national standards to protect access to the vote, ending partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, beginning to overhaul our broken campaign finance system, and creating new safeguards against subversion of the electoral process. The

filibuster must not be a barrier to protecting our freedom to vote.

“The current efforts to advance this important legislation will finally allow for an open and public debate. We will be watching the debate closely. We encourage all to watch closely and note where each senator, regardless of party, stands on preserving democracy and protecting the fundamental right to vote.”

This statement was signed by the following organizations:

- National Coalition on Black Civic Participation/Black Women’s Roundtable President and CEO Melanie Campbell
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Interim President and CEO Wade Henderson
- Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law President and Executive Director Damon Hewitt
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill
- NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson
- National Council of Negro Women Executive Director Janice L. Mathis
- National Urban League President and CEO Marc H. Morial
- National Action Network President and Founder Reverend Al Sharpton

The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) is one of the most active civil rights and social justice organizations in the nation “dedicated to increasing civic engagement, economic and voter empowerment in Black America.” The Black Women’s Roundtable (BWR) is the women and girls’ empowerment and power building arm of the NCBCP. At the forefront of championing just and equitable public policy on behalf of Black women, BWR promotes their health and wellness, economic security & prosperity, education and global empowerment as key elements for success.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 230 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals. For more information on The Leadership Conference and its member organizations, visit www.civilrights.org.

Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law – The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers’ Committee), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. The principal mission of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice for all, particularly in the areas of voting rights, criminal justice, fair housing and community development, economic justice, educational opportunities, and hate crimes. For more information, please visit <https://lawyerscommittee.org>.

Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. 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. 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 NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Follow LDF on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

Founded in 1909 in response to the ongoing violence against Black people around the country, the NAACP is the largest and most pre-eminent civil rights organization in the nation. We have over 2,200 units and branches across the nation, along with well over 2M activists. Our mission is to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP.

[National Council of Negro Women](#) is a Washington, D.C.-based charitable organization making a difference in the lives of women, children, and families through a four-pronged strategy that emphasizes entrepreneurship, health equity, STEAM education, and social justice. Founded 86 years ago, NCNW has 330 community and campus-based sections and thirty-two national affiliates representing more than two million women and men. NCNW's programs are grounded on a foundation of critical concerns known as Four for the Future. NCNW is known for GoodHealthWINS that provides trusted health care information, for producing the Black Family Reunion and the HBCU College Fair. For more information please visit www.ncnw.org or NCNW's social channels via [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [LinkedIn](#).

The National Urban League is a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in order to elevate the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities. The National Urban League spearheads the efforts of its 91 local affiliates through the development of programs, public policy research and advocacy, providing direct services that impact and improve the lives of more than 2 million people annually nationwide. Visit www.nul.org and follow us on Twitter and Instagram: @NatUrbanLeague and @NULPolicy.

National Action Network (NAN) is one of the leading civil rights organizations in the Nation, with chapters throughout the entire United States. Founded in 1991 by Reverend Al Sharpton, NAN works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a modern civil rights plan that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender.

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