



CONNECTICUT NEEDS A VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The Connecticut General Assembly is considering S.B. 471, "An Act Concerning Elections and State Voting Rights." If this landmark legislation is enacted, Connecticut will become a national leader in protecting the right to vote for communities of color.

Federal Courts Have Chipped Away at the Federal Voting Rights Act

- The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted to combat a wide range of barriers and burdens that exclude voters of color from the political process.
- In the decades since its passage, courts have rendered the federal VRA increasingly burdensome for voters of color to vindicate their rights and invalidated one of the core provisions of the law.
- The burden that litigation under the federal VRA places on plaintiffs may prevent voters of color from bringing claims.

Voters of Color in Connecticut Face Longstanding and Evolving Threats to the Franchise

- Connecticut has a record of voter suppression: Prior to the passage of the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, Connecticut rejected amendments to the state constitution to strike the word "white" from qualifications of electors. Connecticut was also the first state in the country to enact a racially discriminatory literacy test for voting and among the last states in which literacy tests were still in use in the 1950s.
- To this day, voters of color in Connecticut routinely encounter long lines and other obstacles when voting. Recently, the Center for Public Integrity observed that Connecticut voters still "face some of the biggest obstacles outside of the south."
- Connecticut's towns and cities use at-large election structures or district maps, some of which may impair the ability of voters of color to elect candidates of their choice or influence the outcome of elections.

S.B. 471 Will Provide Tools to Efficiently Root Out Racial Discrimination in Voting

- S.B. 471 includes five provisions: (1) new private rights action against voter suppression and vote dilution; (2) preclearance provisions, under which covered jurisdictions will be required to submit certain voting-related changes to the Connecticut Secretary of State or a court before they can be implemented; (3) broader language assistance requirements than the federal VRA; (4) a statewide database of information on elections to improve transparency and assist election administrators; and (5) a new private right of action against voter intimidation, deception, and obstruction.
- S.B. 471 presents an historic opportunity for Connecticut to build on the success of state VRAs that have been enacted in California, Washington, Oregon, and Virginia, and add momentum to current efforts to pass a comprehensive state VRA in New York.

If you have questions or need further information, please contact NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) Policy Counsel, Steven Lance, at slance@naacpldf.org.