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Media

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Nation's Oldest Civil Rights Legal Organization Says Federal Legislation to Protect Voters is Urgently Needed

Today, Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Richard Durbin and Senator Raphael Warnock reintroduced the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA) in the United States Senate. The legislation will protect voters from discrimination and strengthen democracy for all Americans. Similar legislation was reintroduced in the U.S. House in September 2023.

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

“We applaud the reintroduction of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act—a vital piece of legislation that will safeguard the fundamental right to vote by strengthening and restoring the Voting Rights Act (VRA), one of the most impactful civil rights laws in our nation’s history.

“It is fitting that this critical legislation is put forward as we approach the 59th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when Black Americans—including civil rights hero John Lewis—endured brutal state-sponsored violence while marching for basic rights, which led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act.

“The VRAA is being reintroduced more than a decade after the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby v. Holder* decimated the heart of the Voting Rights Act by gutting the preclearance protection, which prevented racially discriminatory voting practices from taking effect. This important legislation is needed more now than ever before—as Americans face a wave of voter suppression laws and unprecedented threats of election interference and subversion.

“Since *Shelby* and more recently *Brnovich v. DNC* made it even harder to challenge discriminatory voting laws, states have continued to limit access to the ballot and use the redistricting process to dilute Black voters’ voices. These attacks are especially acute in states where preclearance protected voters of color prior to *Shelby* and have exploded since 2020 as part of a backlash against increased Black voter turnout. States that were formerly protected, including Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas—are all places where LDF has been forced to bring recent litigation to challenge unlawful racial discrimination in voting.

“While LDF successfully enforced the VRA in winning *Allen v. Milligan* at the Supreme Court last June, we need a restored Voting Rights Act to fully protect Black voters without the expense of lengthy, onerous litigation, and without irreparably compromising their right to vote in an election. Indeed, Alabama’s recent unabashed defiance of federal courts that directed the state to enact non-discriminatory voting maps underscores the ongoing need for a strong, modernized VRA.

“The VRAA will provide voters with necessary tools to address discriminatory voting practices and protect all Americans’ equal access to the ballot box. Among other key provisions, the VRAA will restore the preclearance process, ensuring jurisdictions with a recent history of voting rights violations are required to obtain federal approval for changes to voting practices and procedures before they go into effect.

“The Voting Rights Act has enjoyed overwhelming bipartisan support since its enactment, including through consistent bipartisan reauthorization five times and most recently in 2006 with unanimous support in the U.S. Senate.

“We urge all members of Congress to fulfill their obligations to the U.S. Constitution by passing legislation that will fully restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act. We look forward to working with Congress to further strengthen the reintroduced bill and urge all members to cast politics aside and protect our democracy against voting discrimination and election subversion by enacting the VRAA, as well as the Freedom to Vote Act.”

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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.