

NEW YORK NEEDS A COMPREHENSIVE STATE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

THE JOHN R. LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF NEW YORK (S.1046/A.6678)

Until recently, New York was home to some of the most restrictive voting laws in the nation. In the last session, lawmakers made major strides toward fortifying our democracy, but much work remains. We must redouble the effort to ensure that every New Yorker's voice can be heard, that every vote really does count, and that real accountability to voters is the standard in our state. That's what the Voting Rights Act is all about.

THE PROBLEM

New York has an extensive history of voting rights discrimination against racial, ethnic, and language minority groups. The result is a persistent gap between white and non-white New Yorkers in who votes and who gets elected. Access to the vote has improved in recent years, but discriminatory practices like racial gerrymandering, at-large elections that dilute minority voting strength, inconvenient polling locations, language assistance failures, off-cycle elections that depress turnout rates, and even voter intimidation remain widespread in state and local elections.

Meaningful investigation and prosecution of these voting rights violations is a daunting task – they take place across New York's 3,400 jurisdictions that hold elections. For many New Yorkers, this all means the promise of real representation goes unfulfilled.

And all of this takes place in a nationwide landscape where voter suppression is on the rise, vote dilution remains prevalent, and the future of federal voting rights law is uncertain due to a federal

judiciary that is stocked with Trump appointees.

Since the federal Voting Rights Act was gutted, state officials have had to take voting rights into their own hands. It is time for New York to lead the way again, with legislation to fight race-based voter suppression that is stronger and clearer than any federal or state law in America.

The Voting Rights Act will better ensure that all eligible voters can cast a meaningful ballot – but its core aim is to accelerate the participation of those voters who have been historically denied an equal opportunity to participate in the political process. The New Yorkers whose voices have least been heard in our halls of power deserve nothing less.

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THE SOLUTION

The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (S.1046/A.6678) will address long-overlooked infringements on the right to vote, and will make New York a national leader in voting rights at a time when too many other states are trying to restrict access to the franchise. This legislation will address voting rights discrimination through a comprehensive framework that includes:

- **Legal tools** to fight racial voter suppression and vote dilution that are stronger and clearer than federal law or other state laws
- A **preclearance program** bringing the most effective civil rights law in U.S. history back to New York by putting the burden on authorities to avoid discrimination rather than on voters to find and fight discrimination
- Expanded **language assistance** to limited English proficient voters
- **Protections** against voter intimidation, deception, and obstruction
- An instruction to courts to **interpret the Election Law** to ensure that qualified voters can cast ballots and have them counted whenever possible
- The creation of a **central public repository** for election and demographic data to promote transparency and evidence-based best practices for elections