

Talking Points

John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act

National Council of Jewish Women's (NCJW) Message

Our vote is our voice. Throughout our history, NCJW has educated and engaged our advocates to drive voter turnout and expand voting rights, including advocating for women's suffrage and the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), in pursuit of the Jewish value of *tzedek*, or justice. Today, we work for election laws, policies, and practices that ensure easy and equitable access and eliminate obstacles to the electoral process so that every vote counts and can be verified. The 2013 US Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* gutted a key provision of the VRA, making it more difficult to challenge discriminatory voting laws. Since *Shelby*, states across the country have passed dozens of laws making it harder for people to vote. These laws disproportionately harm communities of color, minority-language speakers, low-income voters, elderly and young voters, women, transgender voters, and voters with disabilities. **To restore the strength of the VRA and protect against voter suppression, lawmakers must pass The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.**

- **The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would restore the Voting Rights Act to its former strength.** The 2013 *Shelby* decision effectively ended the federal government's ability, granted by the VRA, to vet changes to state and local election laws before they went into effect (a process known as preclearance). In his decision, Chief Justice Roberts urged Congress to update the formula that determines which jurisdictions need to participate in preclearance. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act does exactly that by requiring states with a certain threshold of voting rights violations in the past 25 years to preclear changes with the Department of Justice. Under the requirement, jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination must get approval from the Department of Justice or a federal court in Washington, DC before changing their voting laws or practices to ensure that the changes are not discriminatory.
- **Voter suppression most harms already marginalized communities.** Laws and actions designed to make it harder to vote — including strict voter ID requirements, limits to early voting, and voter roll purges — disproportionately impact communities of color, minority-language speakers, low-income voters, elderly and young voters, women, and

transgender individuals. For example, women are more likely than men to undergo changes to their legal name through marriage or divorce, which puts them at risk for disenfranchisement in states with strict voter ID laws.

- **The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act responds to the modern-day challenges of voter suppression.** Since the Supreme Court struck down the VRA's preclearance formula, state legislatures across the country have nearly 100 anti-voter laws that restrict access to the ballot. In addition to preventing the implementation of these types of discriminatory, restrictive laws, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would promote transparency by requiring all jurisdictions to provide public notice of election changes.