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June 22, 2017

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the students they serve, we urge you to cosponsor and support the *Voting Rights Advancement Act* (H.R. 2978). This bill will update and reinstate the vital voter protection provisions that were undone in the 2013 Supreme Court ruling that struck down Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The original Voting Rights Act (VRA)—enacted in response to persistent and purposeful discrimination through literacy tests, poll taxes, intimidation, threats, and violence—had remarkable success in ensuring access to the voting booth. For millions of racial, ethnic, and language minority citizens, it eliminated discriminatory practices and removed other barriers to political participation.

In *Shelby County v. Holder*, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated Section 4(b), a key provision of the Voting Rights Act. Section 4(b) contained the coverage formula that determined which jurisdictions were subject to “preclearance,” crucial oversight from the federal government when states with a history of voter discrimination wished to change their voting laws. This oversight was an invaluable voter protection in states and localities with a chronic history of voter discrimination and suppression. The Supreme Court ruled that the coverage formula to trigger preclearance was based on decades old data and no longer responded to current needs.


In direct response to *Shelby*, the *Voting Rights Advancement Act* is modern, flexible, forward-looking legislation designed to protect 21st century voters. It contains a modern-day formula that requires states and localities with a *recent* history of voter discrimination to seek approval from the U.S. Department of Justice before making any changes to their electoral laws. Among other things, H.R. 2978 allows for greater transparency with nationwide notification, provides nationwide review and remedies for current discrimination, and halts discriminatory voting changes before they take effect. The bill also protects voters from the types of voting changes that disproportionately suppress voter access and turnout among minorities, young adults, and the elderly.

While the Voting Rights Act was successful in eliminating the voter suppression devices over the past four decades, voter suppression efforts continue to evolve and the need for its protections persist. In recent years, we have seen an unprecedented number of anti-voter initiatives in state legislatures—proposals and laws enacted that require photo identification, eliminate same-day

registration, shrink early voting windows, change student voting requirements, and make it hard for people to vote in other ways. In the 2016 election, the first in decades without the protection of the Voting Rights Act, 33 states had implemented laws that could lead to voter suppression.

The *Voting Rights Advancement Act* (H.R. 2978) reaffirms our commitment to voter equality and creates more pathways to voter access. Your support of strengthening the Voting Rights Act, as this bill does, is critical to the continued protection of the democratic voice of every American. I urge you to cosponsor and support the *Voting Rights Advancement Act*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan
Director, Government Relations
National Education Association