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October 19, 2021

U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach and support students and prepare them for the responsibilities of citizenship, we urge you to vote YES on the Freedom to Vote Act (S. 2747). Votes on this issue may be included in the NEA Report Card for the 117th Congress.

The ability to vote gives all who are eligible—regardless of color, ZIP code, religion, income, or other factors—the opportunity to participate in our democracy. Whether a voter is rich or poor, the principle of “one person, one vote” levels the playing field; when we are casting our ballots, it does not matter what we do for a living or whether we have influence and connections. All voices are equally important and no vote is more important than any other vote.

Expansion of the franchise is among the greatest American achievements of the 20th century; it has strengthened our nation, made us the envy of the world, and given us the standing to propagate democracy around the globe. Many people—some of whom are well-known to us, others of whom were unsung heroes whose stories were never recorded in the history books—sacrificed more than we will ever truly appreciate to achieve the broad voting rights we enjoy today.

Yet, this hard-won, quintessentially American right is under unprecedented attack across the nation. So far, [19 states have enacted 33 laws that make it harder to vote](#), according to the Brennan Center for Justice, which notes that states that have enacted restrictive laws “tend to be ones in which voting is already relatively difficult.” These laws employ a range of tactics, including shortening the time for mail-in ballots, imposing harsh voter ID requirements, and limiting the availability, number, and location of ballot drop boxes. As news of these measures spreads, confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety may do as much to suppress voting as the laws themselves.

These attempts to constrain voting—and in particular, to silence the voices of Black and Indigenous citizens, young and old citizens, and citizens with disabilities—would return us to a time when race, class, and power determined one’s ability to have a say in matters of politics and policy. The Freedom to Vote Act is a crucial tool to counter this trend. It sets national standards for safely and freely casting our ballots; ensures that every vote is counted and that our ability to vote will not depend on where we happen to live; and protects the sanctity of the electoral process.

The legislation’s provisions include:

- Making Election Day a national holiday;
- Requiring states to offer early voting for at least two weeks prior to Election Day, including nights and weekends, for at least 10 hours a day (with more limited hours in jurisdictions with 3,000 or fewer voters);

- Requiring, to the extent possible, that early voting polling places be within walking distance of public transportation, accessible to rural voters, and located on college campuses;
- Creating a national standard permitting no-excuse vote by mail for all eligible voters;
- Requiring all states to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the same access to absentee ballots and applications as other voters;
- Promoting a national standard for states that have a voter ID requirement that allows for the use of a wide range of forms of identification;
- Restoring federal voting rights to formerly incarcerated citizens when they are released;
- Requiring states to ensure that lines last no longer than 30 minutes and restricting states from prohibiting donations of food or water to voters in line;
- Requiring uniform rules for congressional redistricting that would include banning partisan gerrymandering;
- Modernizing voter registration by setting a national standard for automatic registration, same-day registration, online registration;
- Preventing unlawful purging of voter rolls; and
- Protecting against post-election attempts to tamper with election results by increasing the penalties for destroying or altering ballots and other election records.

While the Freedom to Vote Act takes a number of important steps to protect the right to vote, we believe it would be most effective in tandem with the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA). The VRAA would restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by strengthening the government's ability to ensure that minority voters can participate in the electoral process. Both of these measures, as well as others that would protect voters' access to the polls, are crucial.

Just as expanding voting rights epitomized our democracy in the last century, the fight against retrenching voting rights will ultimately symbolize our defense of democracy in *this* century. If the Senate fails to act, we will look back on this moment with deep regret. Our pride in America and in the institution of voting will erode, and other nations will regard us not as the "city upon the hill," but as a cautionary tale of how a fundamental right can be desecrated. We urge you to reaffirm voting rights and restore faith in our electoral process by voting YES on the Freedom to Vote Act.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association