

**Council of State Governments
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Association of Secretaries of State
National Association of Counties
National League of Cities
U.S. Conference of Mayors**

June 9, 2006

Honorable J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 U.S. Capital Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and our members nationwide, we write to urge expedited consideration of legislation to reauthorize expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Section 5, Section 203 and Sections 6 through 9 of that Act help protect the right of every eligible citizen to vote without discrimination. These safeguards must not be permitted to expire and reauthorization is a key legislative priority for our organizations during the 109th Congress.

The Voting Rights Act is rightly considered one of our nation's most effective civil rights laws and has strengthened the protections of the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution. In the 41 years since its initial passage, the Voting Rights Act has enfranchised millions of racial, ethnic, and language minority citizens by breaking down barriers to their political participation. It has helped to build inclusive communities by ensuring that all citizens have an opportunity to participate equally in the electoral process.

Three key provisions of the Voting Rights Act are set to expire on August 6, 2007. Section 5 requires jurisdictions that previously maintained a voting test or device that coincided with low voter registration and turnout to "preclear" changes in their voting practices or procedures with the U.S. Department of Justice. Section 203 requires jurisdictions with a concentration of Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian, or Hispanic voters with limited English proficiency to provide language assistance; and Sections 6-9 authorize the U.S. Attorney General to appoint federal election observers to document and deter unlawful conduct.

These sections have had the cumulative effect of reducing and preventing racial and language discrimination against a significant number of citizens and have helped increase minority participation in elections for candidates at all level of government. While substantial progress has been made since passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, it has not yet resulted in the elimination of voting discrimination. Congress must renew the enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

Enforcement alone, however, is insufficient to fully protect minority voters from discrimination and promote access to the electoral process. Achieving the purposes of the Voting Rights Act requires an ongoing partnership among all levels of government and investment of resources to fully integrate minority voters into our electoral process and break down barriers to participation. This is not an exclusive duty of state and local officials; the federal government should provide necessary funding and technical assistance to assist states, counties and cities in improving the effectiveness of outreach and assistance to minority voters and to assist in meeting the needs of all voters who require assistance to participate in our democracy.

We urge you to promptly renew the expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Further, we look forward to working with you and other members of Congress as well as the Election Assistance Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice in an ongoing commitment to improving participation in our democratic process and meeting the needs of minority voters.

We thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

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cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives