



**CENTER FOR LAW AND  
SOCIAL JUSTICE**  
AT MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE,  
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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**LDF Media**  
212-965-2200 / [media@naacpldf.org](mailto:media@naacpldf.org)

## **New York Voting Rights Consortium Endorses The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York**

Today, the New York Voting Rights Consortium, a non-partisan group of civil rights organizations, reiterated its support for the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York (NYVRA). The consortium, which includes the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, and the Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) at Medgar Evers College, urges the New York State Legislature to pass the NYVRA as soon as possible, as its protections are more critical now than ever, both for New York and for the nation. Yesterday, February 21st, would have been Congressman Lewis's 82nd birthday, and we encourage New York's elected leaders to honor his legacy by safeguarding the "precious, almost sacred" right to vote.

As Congress struggles to pass federal legislation to enact a new preclearance mechanism, it is essential that policymakers in Albany re-create a preclearance system for jurisdictions in New York, where the risk of discrimination against voters of color remains high. By requiring those jurisdictions to obtain approval from the state attorney general's office or a court before they change any voting procedures, the NYVRA will address this urgent threat to the rights of New York's citizens. And it will position New York as a national leader in protecting the right to vote.

"This act is a critical piece of legislation that, for New York residents, will restore many of the former federal voter protections that were significantly weakened by the Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder*," said Sherrilyn Ifill, LDF's President and Director-Counsel. "In particular, the reintroduction of preclearance will help ensure that voters of color in New York have equal access to the ballot box—and that they are safeguarded from voter suppression tactics. In the strongest terms, we urge state lawmakers to make this bill a top priority this session."

“The New York State Voting Rights Act will protect New Yorkers of African descent and other people of color from voter discrimination fueled by increasingly restrictive and onerous laws that chip away at minority suffrage,” says Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq., Executive Director at the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College. “This critical legislation seeks to create a New York State version of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) and will restore many of the VRA protections that were gutted by the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby vs. Holder*. These protections will allow our communities to engage in American democracy more freely by casting ballots to determine its future at every level. For more than 30 years, CLSJ has fought to protect and advance voting rights for New Yorkers of African descent, and we are excited to see our state elected officials continue in this fight for justice.”

“Latinos in New York account for more than two million eligible voters statewide – the largest nonwhite voting bloc in the state. LatinoJustice PRLDEF strongly supports the New York State Voting Rights Act, which provides proactive protections to ensure that the fundamental right to vote is available to Latino and other minority voters. The bill provisions requiring assistance for language-minority voters in any electoral jurisdictions where more than two percent of citizens (or 4,000 registrants) of voting age are part of a single-language minority group will help ensure that Spanish-speaking New Yorkers are able to exercise their right to vote without facing insurmountable language barriers,” said Lourdes Rosado, President and General Counsel, LatinoJustice PRLDEF.

“Asian Americans have experienced incredible growth in New York state much like the rest of the country, yet our share of political power underwhelms our share of the population. This underrepresentation is a direct result of the historically discriminatory policies designed to suppress our vote and ability to fully engage in the democratic process. Despite the protections of the federal Voting Rights Act, Asian Americans and communities of color have had to turn to ‘good trouble’ to fight for our fair share. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York is vital to ensure New York’s halls of power truly reflect the will of its vibrant and diverse electorate,” said Jerry Vattamala, Director of the Democracy Program at Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Certain jurisdictions in New York State have a long history of discriminating against voters of color through suppressive election laws and policies. These have included voter purges in which predominantly Latinx and Asian American people were removed from the state’s voter rolls, congressional redistricting plans that discriminated against communities of color by making it more difficult for them to elect their preferred candidates, and the frequent use of at-large elections, which often prevent voters of color from electing any candidates of choice if they constitute a minority of their jurisdiction’s population.

Section 5 of the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) required some of those jurisdictions, along with all or part of 14 additional states, to submit any voting-related changes for preclearance to a federal court or the attorney general to determine whether they were discriminatory. This preclearance mechanism was considered the “heart” of the Voting Rights Act. In the devastating 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, the Supreme Court essentially immobilized Section 5.

In addition to restoring preclearance, the proposed law—sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Zellnor Myrie as S.1046A, and in the Assembly by Assemblymember Latrice Walker and others as A.6678A—strengthens other voter protections, making it easier to address instances of vote dilution and voter suppression, intimidation, or interference. It also enhances language-access protections and increases public access to data necessary for voting rights enforcement, election protection, and transparent policymaking by public officials.

The consortium strongly supports this legislation and any other efforts that remove burdens for New York residents—including the more than three million registered voters in New York who identify as Black, Latino, or Asian—to participate in the electoral process and exercise their constitutional rights.

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### ***About LDF***

*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*

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### ***About LatinoJustice***

*LatinoJustice PRLDEF works to create a more just society by using and challenging the rule of law to secure transformative, equitable and accessible justice, by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education. For nearly 50 years, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has acted as an advocate against injustices throughout the country. To learn more about LatinoJustice, visit [www.LatinoJustice.org](http://www.LatinoJustice.org)*

### ***About AALDEF***

*The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), a New York-based national organization founded in 1974, protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all. AALDEF focuses on critical issues affecting Asian Americans, including immigrant rights, voting rights and democracy, economic justice for workers, educational equity, housing and environmental justice, and the elimination of anti-Asian violence.*

***About The Center For Law And Social Justice At Medgar Evers College***

*CLSJ's mission is to address racial justice issues by providing quality legal advocacy, conducting community education campaigns, facilitating research and building organizing capacity on behalf of New Yorkers of African descent and the disenfranchised. To learn more about CLSJ visit [www.CLSJ.org](http://www.CLSJ.org).*