



August 24, 2021

Dear Representative:

On behalf of YWCA USA, a network of over 200 local associations in 45 states and the District of Columbia, I write today to express our **support for the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4)** and urge you to **VOTE YES** when the bill comes to the House floor for a vote.

As one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the nation, YWCA USA is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. We have been at the forefront of the most pressing social movements for more than 160 years—from voting rights to civil rights, from affordable housing to pay equity, from violence prevention to health care reform. Today, YWCA serves over 2 million women, girls and family members of all ages and backgrounds each year in more than 1,200 communities across the U.S.

YWCAs provide racial justice and civil rights programming to more than 150,000 women, children, and families each year. We are outspoken advocates at the federal level on a broad range of justice system, civil rights, and voting rights issues, particularly those that impact equity, rights, and racial justice for women and girls of color. Moreover, YWCA's annual civic engagement efforts include our YWomenVote report and campaign, which in 2020 engaged more than 600,000 women and registered voters through issue education, voter registration, and voter mobilization efforts across our network.

Informed by our long history of advocating for legislation and policies that expand access to the ballot box for all of America's citizens, and our particular focus on ensuring justice and equality for communities of color, YWCA strongly supports passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA)(H.R.4). We note in particular the following:

- In the aftermath of the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*—which struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act that protected voters in areas with a history of voting discrimination—**states have created barriers that disproportionately affect communities of color, the elderly, and young people.** As a result, voters have seen stricter voter identification laws, limited voting times (including cutting back early voting opportunities), restricted voter registration (including elimination of same-day voter registration), and the shuttering of polling places which makes polling locations inaccessible for many.
- **State efforts to restrict voting are on the rise:** Between January 1 and July 14, 2021, at least 18 states enacted 30 new laws that restrict voting rights. More than 400 bills with restrictive provisions have been introduced in 29 states in the 2021 legislative sessions. The Supreme Court's decision this summer in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* further undermines the ability of voters and the courts to eliminate these new and emerging barriers.

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- ***The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would strengthen our democracy by restoring and modernizing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.*** The VRAA would make critical changes to the preclearance process, so that there is federal review of voting changes by states and localities with a history of racially discriminatory voting practices, and federal review of specific voting changes that are known to be discriminatory, *before* those voting changes are implemented. Additional provisions in the VRAA work to respond to modern day barriers faced by voters across the country, increase transparency, and protect all Americans' right to vote.

We must, as a nation, repair the damage of recent Supreme Court decisions by taking immediate action to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Together, we can ensure that all individuals, particularly communities of color and disenfranchised voting populations, have equal access to the ballot box. There is simply too much at stake for women of color and marginalized communities to be sidelined in exercising their most fundamental rights of citizenship -- and we *all* have a stake in ensuring that our elections are an open and transparent process we can trust.

Thank you in advance for your support and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact Pam Yuen, YWCA USA Director of Government Relations, at pyuen@ywca.org or 202-559-7022 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Elisha Rhodes
Interim Chief Executive Officer

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