

NATIVE AMERICAN VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2019 (S. 739/H.R. 1694)

BACKGROUND

Today, 1.2 million (34%) of Native Americans are eligible but not registered to vote.¹ Unique and persistent barriers to the ballot box continue to hinder Native Americans from casting their ballots and making their voices heard. Restrictive voting laws throughout the United States often carry discriminatory effects, disproportionately affecting Native American communities. Native Americans have encountered heightened restrictions and barriers to voting including:

- Restrictive voting laws including the lack of recognition of tribal IDs;
- Limited voting access for Native Americans including limited polling sites and drop boxes for absentee ballots;
- Lack of enough election resources for Native American communities' resources including poll workers or interpreters for non-English speaking individuals; and
- Lack of protections and preclearance procedures afforded to Native Americans once covered by the Voting Rights Act but later gutted after the 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*.

Research from the National Congress of American Indians has shown that these barriers result in 5 to 14 percentage point lower turnout rates of American Indian and Alaska Native voters than other racial and ethnic groups.²

WHAT THE NATIVE AMERICAN VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2019 WOULD DO

The Native American Voting Rights Act (S. 739/H.R. 1694) takes critical steps to ensure Native Americans can register to vote and access all mechanisms for voting. This is accomplished by:

- Expanding voter registration under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 to cover all federal facilities and increasing voter registration sites and polling locations for Native American peoples.
- Authorizing all forms of identification unique to Indian Tribes and their members for voting purposes to ensure the necessary ID for voting.

- Addressing the devastating effects of *Shelby County v. Holder* by establishing preclearance procedures to prohibit states with a history of restricting access to the polls on Native American land from undertaking discriminatory actions without Department of Justice agreement and government-to-government consultation.
- Establishing a Native American voting task force grant program in coordination with the U.S. Department of Interior to increase voter outreach, education, registration, and turnout in Native American communities, train and educate local poll workers about materials and resources unique to their communities, and streamline overall access to the ballot box.

At its foundation, the right to vote is a sacred right that should be accessible to all eligible voters. It's time Congress acts to remove barriers between Native peoples and the ballot box.

PLEASE COSPONSOR THE VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT OF 2019 (S. 739/H.R. 1694)

- NAVRA takes positive steps to ensure that Native Americans, a historically disenfranchised group, have a voice in the democratic process that directly impacts their lives, families, and communities—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and economic status.
- NAVRA establishes preclearance procedures for specific subsets of states that have a recent record of restricting access to the polls on Indian lands.
- NAVRA expands Native American voter registration to cover all Federal facilities, at the request of an Indian Tribe.

YWCA is committed to ensuring all individuals, particularly communities of color and disenfranchised voting populations, have equal access to the ballot box. We have been at the forefront of the most pressing social movements for more than 160 years and will continue to do so until equity is achieved.

YWCA urges all Members of Congress to cosponsor the Native American Voting Rights Act of 2019 (S. 739/H.R. 1694).

¹ National Congress of American Indians: Fast Facts. Retrieved 31 December 2019 from http://www.ncai.org/initiatives/campaigns/NCAI_NativeVoteInfographic.pdf

² Id.