

VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT (VRAA) OF 2019 (S. 561/H.R. 4)

BACKGROUND

Although originally limited to educated white men who owned property, the Constitutional right to vote has been expanded over time to include women, people of color, Native Americans, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals. The 19th Amendment to the Constitution, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the National Voter Registration Act are among the critical steps our nation has taken to ensure that historically disenfranchised people have a voice in the democratic process.

Despite this progress, voters in recent years have encountered significant barriers to participating in elections. Following the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*— which invalidated key provisions of the Voting Rights Act that for decades protected voters in areas with a history of voting discrimination — states have created barriers to voting by imposing strict voter identification laws, limiting voting times, restricting voter registration, and purging voter rolls. Millions of voters have experienced long lines, inaccessible polling places, broken voting machines, voter roll purges, and voter registration complications since the *Shelby County* decision. Racial minorities are among those hit hardest by these barriers.

WHAT THE VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT (VRAA) OF 2019 WOULD DO:

VRAA—legislation drafted in response to the *Shelby County* decision — works to prevent voter suppression across the country by examining and addressing voting rights violations in states and localities. VRAA would make changes to the preclearance process, which requires approval from the Department of Justice before states and localities can make changes to voting rights in states and localities with a history of racially discriminatory voting practices. This is accomplished by:

- Creating a “practice-based preclearance” process for reviewing proposed changes in voting rights, therefore preventing discrimination against voters of color such as:
 - Changes to the voting process or redistricting of racially, ethnically, or linguistically diverse areas;
 - Reduction in language assistance;
 - Changes to documentation or requirements to vote or register to vote.
- Increasing transparency by requiring public notice for changes in voting.

- Allowing the attorney general to request the presence of federal observers anywhere a serious threat of racial discrimination in voting exists.
- Allowing a federal court order to outrank states or jurisdictions for violations where the effect of a voting measure is racial discrimination in voting and denial of the right to vote.
- Increasing accessibility and protections for Native American and Alaska Native voters.

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- VRAA takes positive steps to ensure that historically disenfranchised people have a voice in the democratic process that directly impacts their lives, families, and communities — regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and economic status.
- VRAA's coverage formula focuses on states that have a recent record of racial discrimination in voting and provides a pathway for coming out of coverage.

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 Senators to cosponsor the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2019 (S. 561/H.R. 4).