

**Testimony of Tomas Lopez
Executive Director, Democracy North Carolina**

**Before the Committee on House Administration, Subcommittee on Elections,
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Field Hearing on Voting Rights and Election Administration in North Carolina
April 18, 2019**

Chair Fudge, Ranking Member Davis, and Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for your field hearing on voting rights and election administration in North Carolina, and to share the experiences of this state's voters, who in recent years have been subjected to consistent attacks on voting access and deliberate, extreme racial and partisan gerrymanders. These measures have undermined both the ability for voters to participate in elections and the effectiveness of participation itself—by design. North Carolina's experience underscores the necessity of congressional action to both restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act and establish new standards to facilitate meaningful access to the political process.

My name is Tomas Lopez, and I am the executive director of Democracy North Carolina. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to, among other goals, protect the right to vote in our state. As part of this work, we seek to bring North Carolinians – especially historically underrepresented people of color – into the political process and encourage their participation and leadership through voting, monitoring the election process, and issue advocacy. We also author original research on election administration, help coordinate a statewide nonpartisan poll monitoring and voter assistance network, and advocate for policies and practices that we believe will increase voter access and participation. Prior to this position, I was a voting rights attorney at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, where I litigated voting rights cases in the federal courts, contributed to research on election law and administration, and supported election reform efforts in several states.

This submission addresses several issues:

- Repeated efforts to restrict voting access through several means, including strict photo identification requirements and reductions to early voting;
- The voting experience in North Carolina, especially as to voters subjected to dysfunction and intimidation;
- The perpetuation of false narratives regarding voter fraud; and
- Extreme racial and partisan gerrymandering.

Many of these issues are the results of a concerted, years-long effort to limit voter participation and impact for the sake of short-term, perceived political advantage. All damage the vitality of our state and its democracy by harming the public's ability to meaningfully take part in the political process.

Repeated Efforts to Restrict Voting Access

Over most of the past decade, North Carolina has been subject to comprehensive, consistent, and repeated efforts to restrict voting access, especially after the loss of federal oversight following the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. By design and in effect, these restrictions target voters of color, young people, and low-income citizens.

2013 Omnibus Law

On the very same day as the *Shelby County* decision in 2013, Senator Tom Apodaca, then the Rules Chair of the North Carolina State Senate, announced that the General Assembly leadership no longer had to worry about the “legal headache” of preclearance and could “go with the full bill” remaking the state’s elections system.¹ That full bill, H589, installed one of the nation’s strictest photo ID requirements and eliminated Same Day Registration during the early voting period; pre- registration of 16- and 17-year-olds; and the first week of early voting (including a Sunday traditionally used by Black churches for “Souls to the Polls” activities). These reforms had moved North Carolina from consistently ranking in the bottom twelve states for eligible voter turnout to 10th in the nation in 2012.²

H589’s passage led to years of costly litigation. In 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit found that the ID requirement and the elimination of the above reforms were enacted with racially discriminatory intent and “target[ed] African-Americans with almost surgical precision.”³

The preclearance regime invalidated in *Shelby County* was created to deter laws like H589 from being passed, review potentially harmful laws before they went into effect, and avoid time-intensive and financially expensive lawsuits. Without it, North Carolina voters were subjected to a restrictive and intentionally discriminatory bill that became law and required several years and substantial resources to defeat in court, confusing voters and wasting the limited resources of state and county boards of elections.

2018 Voter ID Constitutional Amendment and Implementing Legislation

In the nearly three years since the Fourth Circuit’s invalidation of H589, North Carolina’s legislature has attempted to revive elements of that law by piecemeal.

As to a strict photo identification requirement, the North Carolina General Assembly introduced and passed a ballot measure that amended the North Carolina Constitution to require photo identification from voters casting ballots in person, with exceptions. While voters approved broadly worded constitutional language, the General Assembly passed implementing legislation during a lame-duck period after which the majority party lost its ability to override gubernatorial vetoes.⁴ As expected, this implementing legislation closely mirrors the voter ID statute invalidated in 2016.

One difference in the new statute is language that allows for the use of student and employee IDs for voting. But while that would appear to be an improvement on its face, this has so far proven to not be

¹ Laura Leslie, “NC voter ID bill moving ahead with Supreme Court ruling,” WRAL, June 25, 2013, <http://www.wral.com/nc-senator-voter-id-bill-moving-ahead-with-ruling/12591669/>

² Democracy North Carolina. Voter Turnout in North Carolina, 1980 to 2012, <https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PresidentTurnoutNC1980-2012.pdf>.

³ *North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP, et al. v. McCrory*, 831 F.3d 204 (4th Cir. 2016).

⁴ S.L. 2018-144.

the case. As written, the law requires universities, colleges, and community colleges to attest under penalty of perjury as to citizenship verification procedures outside of the scope of their work and within the scope of existing procedures under state and federal law, and imposes other administrative challenges that discouraged North Carolina campuses from complying, such as requiring that school staff take ID photographs themselves and modify their ID documentation.⁵ From the passage of the legislation, institutions were given less than three months to determine their ability to comply with these requirements and submit their attestation letters to state officials. As of this submission, 37 community colleges, colleges, and universities out of over 100 eligible institutions submitted documentation to the State Board of Elections in order to have their student ID cards approved for voting use in 2020. Of those, 11 campuses were denied – 10 constituent universities of the University of North Carolina system, including the flagship in Chapel Hill, and one HBCU. The General Assembly is currently considering legislation that would modify these requirements, including by removing the attestation requirement for institutions; that measure passed the North Carolina House, but faces uncertain prospects in the Senate.⁶

We are concerned that, in practice, the ID law will work in much the same way as its predecessor— by imposing both a formal barrier for eligible voters, and an informal one that deters them from casting ballots due to confusion, misinformation, misapplication of the law, or intimidation. Indeed, the introduction of student IDs as another potentially-eligible ID for voting, but one that requires the institution to receive pre-approval by the State Board of Elections, increases the likely impact of both of these barriers on young voters in 2020.

Reductions to Early Voting

Restrictions to early voting have been another hallmark voter suppression tactic since 2013, when H589 cut a week off of North Carolina’s early voting period. North Carolina county boards of elections (BOEs) hold significant power over voting access in this state through their ability to set polling locations, determine early voting schedules, and train poll workers on current law. During the 2014 and 2016 election cycles, these county bodies implemented changes to local election procedures that resulted in reduced access for voters of color:

- In 2014, the Lincoln County Board of Elections passed an early voting plan that reduced voting hours from 2010, a move that was overridden by the State Board of Elections. As a result, hours had to be added to the early voting site in Lincolnton, the county seat – something the BOE chair strongly objected to because “it would have been favorable to the Democratic Party.” Although only 13% of the county population lives in Lincolnton, it is the home of 31% of the county’s African American voters.⁷
- In 2014, over the objections of community members, the Forsyth County Board of Elections adopted an early voting plan that moved early voting sites outside of the urban center of Winston-Salem, where the majority of Black voters live, to whiter, more conservative suburbs. The plan removed an early voting site from Winston Salem State University, a HBCU that had been an early voting location in 2012, 2010, and 2008, and did not replace it with any other sites

⁵ N.C.G.S. § 163A-1145.2.

⁶ House Bill 646 (2019).

⁷ Sharon McCloskey, “Lincoln County voters fight for hours at early voting sites,” The Progressive Pulse (NC Policy Watch), Oct. 31, 2014, <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2014/10/31/lincoln-county-voters-fight-for-hours-at-early-voting-sites/>.

in eastern Winston-Salem, although multiple alternatives were suggested. “Our African American community has been hurt,” testified a local Democratic party official before the BOE.⁸

- In 2014 and 2016, the Chavis Heights Community Center precinct in Southeast Raleigh in Wake County demonstrated the effect that having out-of-precinct voting available as an option and its correct implementation by precinct officials can have on access for voters of color. In 2014, when North Carolina did not have out-of-precinct voting in place, our poll monitors counted over 300 voters, mostly African-American, turned away from the poll and sent to other polling locations. In many cases, voters told monitors they would not be able to get to another polling place – one person had used their last money on bus fare to Chavis Heights.⁹ In 2016, when out-of-precinct voting was permitted following the Fourth Circuit’s ruling, poll monitors reported that the chief judge at the polling place refused to offer provisional ballots to out-of-precinct voters. When voters demanded an out-of-precinct provisional, as was their right, precinct officials discouraged them from casting a ballot, saying, “it won’t count anyway.”¹⁰
- In 2016, in an attempt to blunt the impact of the Fourth Circuit’s decision to restore the first week of early voting, many of the Republican-led county BOEs adopted early voting plans with fewer hours and sites during the first restored week. There were dramatic reductions in early voting hours in Guilford (-660), Mecklenburg (-282), Brunswick (-165), Craven (-141), Johnston (-124), Robeson (-121), and Jackson (-113) counties. Of those, Guilford, Craven, and Robeson counties were previously covered under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, and Mecklenburg and Johnston have significant Black voting populations, 33% and 16% of all registered voters (as of October 22, 2016) respectively.

A second troubling development is a June 2018 law, S325, which mandates a 12-hour early voting schedule during the week and requires those same hours across all sites.¹¹ While uniformity may present theoretical benefits, the extended 12-hour day required by S325 has in practice increased the costs of early voting for counties and, in turn, reduced the total availability of early voting, particularly weekend hours.

North Carolina law requires counties to make early voting available at a minimum of one location and permits counties to establish additional early voting locations. In past cycles counties, especially in low-resourced areas, made early voting available at different times across a variety of locations during the early voting window— for instance, by having some sites open only on the weekends, or offering Sunday voting at only one or two locations. The 2018 law makes this impossible by requiring that counties keep any given early voting site open on the same days and same hours as all others. Additionally, the mandatory 12-hour weekday schedule forces counties to staff sites at hours when voters do not typically vote, thus reducing the total number of sites counties can afford to staff without increasing the number of usable voting hours.

This has produced several consequences in practice:¹²

- 43 counties reduced the number of early voting sites in 2018 compared to 2014.

⁸ Meghann Evans, “Forsyth elections board approves early voting plan” Winston-Salem Journal, July 22, 2014, http://www.journalnow.com/news/local/forsyth-elections-board-approves-early-voting-plan/article_7cbf2a6a-11d3-11e4-b1fa-001a4bcf6878.html.

⁹ Isela Gutierrez and Bob Hall, Democracy North Carolina, *Alarm Bells from Silenced Voters* (June 2015), <https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SilencedVoters.pdf>.

¹⁰ Isela Gutierrez, Democracy North Carolina, *From the Voter’s View: Lessons from the 2016 Election* (January 2018), https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PostElectionReport_DemNC_web.pdf.

¹¹ S.L. 2018-112. As originally written, the statute removed the final Saturday of early voting beginning in 2018; this was subsequently postponed.

¹² Democracy North Carolina has compiled these figures for use in this submission and in future reporting.

- 51 counties reduced the number of weekend days offered.
- 67 counties – over two-thirds of North Carolina’s 100 counties – reduced the number of weekend hours.
- Of the eight counties where a majority of voters are Black, four reduced sites, seven reduced weekend days, and all eight reduced the number of weekend hours during early voting. None saw increases in sites or weekend options.
- A ProPublica and WRAL analysis of Early Voting sites elimination found that about 1 in 5 rural voters saw the distance to an Early Voting site increase by more than a mile— and in some counties, like Halifax, the average distance between voters and Early Voting sites increased by as much as 6 miles.¹³

Despite these reductions, North Carolina voters turned out in impressive number in last year’s midterm election. But high overall turnout does not necessarily mean widespread or equitable access. Indeed, the three counties where turnout rates (the percentage of registered voters who cast ballots) decreased compared to 2014 are telling. Two were Jones and Pamlico, which received federal assistance after Hurricane Florence. The other was Halifax, the site of this field hearing, which had three Early Voting locations in 2012, 2014, and 2016, but only one in 2018. Halifax also saw the greatest increase in the average distance from voters to Early Voting Sites due to S325.

Elimination of the Last Saturday of Early Voting

Starting in 2019, S325 also eliminates the popular final Saturday of early voting for all future elections. It was traditionally the only weekend voting day offered in all 100 counties, and the turnout numbers bore that out— that day has traditionally been one of the highest turnout days of the entire voting period, despite the fact that many counties keep sites open for shorter periods that day than during the work week. We anticipate that this will result in the majority of North Carolina counties having no weekend Early Voting options, which are crucial for voters who work Monday through Friday. Without the last Saturday in 2018, 63 counties would have had no weekend option for voters to cast their ballots. Or, if weekend hours are offered, they will be offered at a minimal number of sites, which would be especially harmful to rural voters in sprawling counties without public transportation.

And in addition to being hugely popular with voters overall, this last Saturday has been disproportionately used by Black voters in North Carolina at the statewide level and in a sizable majority of the state’s 100 counties in the last five election cycles. In 2018, Black voters made up 22% of registered voters, but 27% of those who cast ballots on the last Saturday of Early Voting.

The Voting Experience in North Carolina

As in many states, election administration challenges affect voting access in North Carolina by making voting a more complicated and intimidating experience than it needs to be. We have observed this in action through our voter protection program; during every major election year, we work closely with partner organizations to recruit, train, and place hundreds of volunteer poll monitors at polling locations across the state. These poll monitors survey voters departing locations, and assist those who report problems by connecting them to a hotline locally staffed by volunteer attorneys. In 2018, the program’s 800 volunteers were present at 279 precincts in 55 counties on Election Day: a total that amounted to 1 in 10 polling places in the state. We use the information they collect to report on the voting experience and inform our policy recommendations.

¹³ Tyler Dukes, “Early voting changes hit NC rural voters hardest. But will it matter in 2018?” WRAL, Nov. 1, 2018, <https://www.wral.com/early-voting-changes-hit-nc-rural-voters-hardest-but-will-it-matter-in-2018-/17959224/>.

Through this work, we have observed a cluster of issues North Carolina voters face when they go to the polls, including long lines, machine malfunctions, disability access challenges, and poll worker conduct. Our organization’s report on voter experiences in the 2016 election, *From the Voter’s View: Lessons from the 2016 Election*, discusses these issues in greater detail and is attached to this submission as an appendix.¹⁴ That report also offers recommendations for improved election administration practices relevant to both North Carolina and other jurisdictions. Among these, we wish to highlight our recommendations for more comprehensive poll worker training, increased recruitment of poll workers among young people and in communities of color, and the establishment of a poll worker code of conduct that establishes standards for poll worker behavior and knowledge.

And in addition to these challenges inside the polling place, in recent years, extreme weather has affected the voting experience in our state. Major hurricanes struck North Carolina in both the 2016 and 2018 election seasons. These storms inflicted substantial physical and economic damage while displacing many people, including eligible voters. In 2016, when Hurricane Matthew hit in October, the state extended registration deadlines in storm-affected counties. In 2018, when Hurricane Florence hit in September, the state modified rules regarding the deadlines for and location of the delivery of absentee ballots in storm-affected counties. While we appreciate officials’ attentiveness to the effects of natural disasters, we believe that voters would be served by more comprehensive solutions when the circumstances require it. These include extended registration windows (as in 2016) and absentee ballot measures (as in 2018), but also other steps, including the deployment of resources to make in-person voting more accessible for displaced voters. While we cannot precisely predict the timing of future natural disasters, we can anticipate that hurricanes are increasingly likely to affect our state’s elections and prepare for that inevitability.

The Perpetuation of False Narratives Regarding Voter Fraud

Lawmakers justify voting restrictions by arguing that they are necessary to counter fraudulent activity—namely, incidents in which ineligible individuals cast ballots. But while empirical research and lived experience refute these assertions,¹⁵ public officials in North Carolina have prosecuted isolated instances of mistaken voting, sought voter records on behalf of immigration enforcement authorities, and even leveled subsequently debunked claims of voter impersonation in an attempt to allow the North Carolina General Assembly to decide the 2016 gubernatorial election. These practices have respectively harmed individual voters and unjustifiably undermined public confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Prosecution of the “Alamance 12” and Non-Citizen Voters

In April 2017, the North Carolina State Board of Elections released an audit of the 2016 election that found, among other things, that 441 people serving a felony sentence and 31 non-citizens voted in that year’s election.¹⁶ In informal conversations, State Board of Elections staff acknowledged that the majority of the 441 justice-involved individuals who cast their 2016 ballots did so simply by mistake, not with the intent to commit fraud. These were instances in which individuals were not told of their

¹⁴ This report is also available at https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PostElectionReport_DemNC_web.pdf.

¹⁵ See “Resources on Voter Fraud Claims,” Brennan Center for Justice, <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/resources-voter-fraud-claims> (compilation of studies and analyses on the prevalence of voter fraud).

¹⁶ North Carolina State Board of Elections, 2016 General Election Post- Election Audit Report, Apr. 21, 2017, https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/sboe/Post-Election%20Audit%20Report_2016%20General%20Election/Post-Election_Audit_Report.pdf.

ineligibility by the courts, community supervision, or even election officials. However, under North Carolina law, these 441 committed another felony offense simply by voting.¹⁷

In Alamance County, where the sheriff had been previously sued by the U.S. Department of Justice for racially profiling Latinos,¹⁸ the district attorney prosecuted 12 of the individuals identified in the audit, who became known as the “Alamance 12.” Ultimately, charges were dismissed or pled down to misdemeanors for all twelve individuals, but the damage done to these individuals’ willingness to participate in the electoral process was lasting. Ivy Johnson, one of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice attorneys who defended Willie Vinson, Jr., noted that her client was “someone who has been an active participant in our democratic process, and has shared all of core democratic values and now, because of this case, may not ever participate again.”¹⁹

At the federal level, a similar pattern of zealous prosecution of non-citizens has emerged, also using the data from the North Carolina State Board of Elections 2017 audit. In August 2018, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of North Carolina announced charges against 19 foreign nationals for unlawfully voting and one U.S. citizen for facilitating this activity. While these charges carry penalties that include prison terms and six-figure fines, courts have begun looking skeptically on these cases. In one instance, a judge chastised local election officials and fined the defendant a mere one hundred dollars after learning she had presented her green card when attempting to register to vote, and the election official permitted her to register.²⁰

Fraudulent Claims of Voter Fraud in the 2016 Gubernatorial Race

In 2016, North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory lost his seat by a very narrow margin: 5,000 votes, a figure that entitled him to request a recount. But instead of doing so, his campaign used other legal mechanisms to lift up dubious fraud allegations and challenge the legitimacy of the election itself. State law provides for an “elections protest,” a legal proceeding designed to identify and remedy serious irregularities that could impact an election outcome. Supported by the North Carolina Republican Party and the Virginia-based law firm of Holtzman Vogel Josefiak Torchinsky, the McCrory campaign protested over 400 absentee ballots in Bladen, Halifax, Greene, Franklin, and other counties with Black voter mobilization groups.²¹ Additionally, the campaign used a deeply flawed data-matching process to file election protests accusing 119 individuals of committing fraud by either voting while serving a felony sentence or voting in two states. In total, these accusations of illegal voting affected about 600 ballots statewide, though endemic fraud was insinuated. Ultimately, the Republican-controlled county Boards of Elections dismissed dozens of protests, finding that more than 95% of the 600 ballots identified in protests were cast by legal voters.²²

¹⁷ Jack Healy, “Arrested, Jailed, and Charged With a Felony. For Voting.” N.Y. Times, Aug. 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/02/us/arrested-voting-north-carolina.html>.

¹⁸ Jessica Jones, “N.C. Sheriff Terry Johnson On Trial For Racial Profiling,” Nat’l Public Radio, Aug. 15, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/08/15/340562910/n-c-sheriff-terry-johnson-on-trial-for-racial-profiling>.

¹⁹ Lynn Bonner, “Felony charges of illegal voting dismissed for five NC residents,” News & Observer (Raleigh), Aug. 13, 2018, <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/politics-government/article216584335.html>.

²⁰ Josh Shaffer, “A green-card holder voted illegally three times in NC. The judge scolds election officials.” News & Observer (Raleigh), Jan. 17, 2019, <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/state/north-carolina/article224701095.html>.

²¹ The 2016 Bladen County election protest claiming absentee ballot fraud was filed by L. McCrae Dowless, who in 2018 was implicated in the operation of an illegal absentee ballot harvesting operation that led to a new election for U.S. House seat representing North Carolina’s Ninth Congressional District.

²² Bob Hall & Isela Gutierrez, Democracy North Carolina, *The Deceit of Voter Fraud* (May 2017), <https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FraudReport.pdf>.

Democracy North Carolina believes that the McCrory campaign’s legal and publicity efforts sought to establish sufficient concern about the election’s fairness to formally contest the election using a state law that would allow it to be decided by the North Carolina General Assembly,²³ which was controlled at the time by a Republican supermajority. Our detailed research, findings of wrongdoing, and request for a criminal investigation of the actors involved are available in our 2017 report, *The Deceit of Voter Fraud*, which is attached as an appendix.

Extreme Racial and Partisan Gerrymandering

North Carolina’s congressional and state legislative maps are some of the most distorted in the nation.²⁴ These maps have preserved legislative and congressional delegation majorities that outstrip statewide partisan voting totals. But as North Carolina House Rules Chair David Lewis famously explained in 2017, that was exactly the point. While gerrymandering is not new, and both major political parties have historically produced unlawful and unfair maps, North Carolina’s maps this decade have been especially extreme.

This has had two consequences. First, North Carolina’s maps have been the subject of continuous litigation since the 2011 redistricting period. As of this submission, numerous lawsuits have been filed in state and federal courts challenging congressional or legislative maps. The state’s congressional maps were held to be an unlawful racial gerrymander. The ensuing maps are now being challenged as an unlawful partisan gerrymandering; after a U.S. District Court agreed with that case’s challengers, the matter is now before the U.S. Supreme Court. The state’s legislative maps have also been held to be unlawful racial gerrymanders, and these too are now being challenged as partisan gerrymanders in the North Carolina Supreme Court. These issues remain unresolved eight years after the initial maps were drawn and less than two years before a whole new redistricting cycle begins. This is an especially distressing development because it suggests that the current remedies against gerrymandering are ineffective: if the courts take nearly an entire decade to address the problem, and legislatures are able to avoid penalties for their bad behavior, then the incentive to distort maps will only be reinforced.

Second, these maps attack the foundation of representative government by discouraging voter participation and disincentivizing legislators from responding to their constituents. As we explained in an amicus brief submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Rucho v. Common Cause*, Democracy North Carolina staff have encountered citizens who specifically cite gerrymandering a reason to not vote or otherwise participate in civic activities.²⁵ And facts presented by the plaintiffs in this same case speak to elected officials opting out of voter forums and debates because of the security of their seats.²⁶

Recommendation

For the past decade, North Carolina lawmakers have worked to twist the rules governing the access to and administration of North Carolina’s elections. The result is that voting is more difficult, less accessible, and ultimately less meaningful. And in the absence of a credible policy justification for these measures, we are left to conclude that they are motivated by a desire to entrench power for its own sake.

²³ N.C.G.S. § 163A-1182 (recodification of previous 163-182.13A).

²⁴ See, e.g., Laura Royden, Michael Li, & Yuriy Rudensky, Brennan Center for Justice, *Extreme Gerrymandering & The 2018 Midterm 3* (Mar. 23, 2018), <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/extreme-gerrymandering-2018-midterm> (“In North Carolina, even if Democrats win three [U.S. House] seats with 29.66 percent of the statewide vote, they are not projected to compete for a fourth seat until their statewide vote share reaches 52.78 percent, an increase of 23.12 percentage points.”).

²⁵ Brief of Amici Curiae Democracy North Carolina and the People’s Alliance Fund in Support of Appellees 12, *Rucho v. Common Cause* (No. 18-422), Mar. 8, 2019, <https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/18-422-Amici-Brief.pdf>.

²⁶ *Id.* at 14-15.

As both a general rule and a matter of historical record in North Carolina, that desire is not exclusive to a particular ideology or political affiliation, but it has been adopted here and most recently by officials from the legislative majority.

As Congress considers options for action, we strongly urge two. First, to restore the full protections of Voting Rights Act through a coverage formula responsive to the ways in which voting access is hindered today. Second, Congress should establish high standards for voting access nationwide, as has been put forth in HR 1. The protection of voting rights rests long-term on our ability to address problems both as they emerge and before they take root, and also to actively facilitate the participation of every eligible voter in our political process.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.