



Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

UU advocacy in the nation's capital

Write Here! Write Now! For **March 12, 2019 Advocacy Day**

As of 2/24/2019

Contact: advocacy@uusj.org or 703-786-5206; www.uusj.org click on Advocacy

Letter Delivery Instructions - Congregation Organizer: emailed letters must be received by 12 noon ET March 11 to advocacy@uusj.org. All mailed letters must be received by March 7 to:

UUSJ, 7750 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20012.

Write Here! Write Now! March Issue: Tell your U.S. Senators to Restore full protections of the Voting Rights Act

Background, UU Grounding and Key Message

Background: H.R. 1 “For the People Act of 2019” (the first bill introduced in the 116th House of Representatives) outlines a **package of reforms** “to expand Americans’ access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and strengthen ethics rules for public servants One key element of the bill addresses voting rights. It calls for: modernizing voter registration, ending gerrymandering, stopping voter purges and **restoring protections of the Voting Rights Act.**

Timing: The House is expected to vote and pass H.R.1 by early March. A companion bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate (as of February 22). UUs have a long history of standing up for voting rights and voter integrity. **The UUSJ Advocacy Corps will go to the Hill on March 12 to advocate for provisions in H.R.1 to protect and strengthen our democracy by restoring full protections of the Voting Rights Act.**

History: On June 25, 2013 by a vote of 5-4, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act removing a critical tool, a 40-year-old formula, to combat racial discrimination in voting. Under Section 5 of the landmark civil rights law, jurisdictions with a history of discrimination must seek pre-approval of changes in voting rules that could affect minorities. This process, known as “preclearance,” blocks discrimination before it can occur. In *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Court invalidated Section 4 — which determines the states and localities covered by Section 5 — arguing that current conditions require a new coverage formula. The Court challenged Congress to come up with a new formula, but that process has stalled despite bipartisan efforts.

Impact: Voter suppression has been on the rise since the Supreme Court decision. In 2018, the federal Commission on Civil Rights reported that **federal actions to enforce voting rights for minorities have also declined sharply since the *Shelby* decision.** The Commission calls the present state of discrimination against minority voters “enduring and pernicious.”

UU Grounding: 2017 Statement of Conscience “Escalating Economic Inequity” on the growing income and wealth inequity undergirds many injustices that our faith movement is committed to addressing, including: “...attacks on voting rights.” And our 5th Principle, “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large” compels us to advocate to restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act.

Key Message: Congress must take action to restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act and support additional measures that increase voter turnout, help new communities participate in the process, modernize our voting systems, and make our elections more free, fair and accessible. The right to vote is a fundamental principle of our democracy. When more Americans participate in our elections, the outcomes better reflect who we are as a country.

(See other side for Facts and Talking Points, and a Sample Letter)

Facts and Talking Points

Congress must restore and strengthen the protections of the Voting Rights Act to ensure our elections remain free, fair, and accessible for all Americans. This law and its amendments promised real political equality by **prohibiting racial discrimination in voting**. It aimed to make sure that every citizen, regardless of race, has an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy.

Racial discrimination and voter suppression are on the rise. Clear evidence shows that voting rights have been suppressed in recent years, especially against minorities. 25 states have imposed new restrictions since 2010: 14 states adopted more restrictive voter ID laws, six states have strict voter ID requirements, 12 made it harder to register, seven cut back on early voting opportunities, and three made it harder to restore voting rights for people with past criminal convictions.

Comprehensive, systemic democratic reforms in H.R. 1 are good for all Americans and deserve bipartisan support. The U.S. needs comprehensive reforms included in **H.R.1** that would help defend and expand Americans' access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and strengthen ethics rules for public servants.

As a person of faith, I know that we can't fix issues like poverty, immigration, climate change, and health care -- unless we fix our democracy. We must address the underlying systemic issues that threaten our democracy.

Suggestions for Writing Your Letters:

- **Focus on the topic** – Urge action to improve voting rights and access for all voters to this democratic right and privilege.
- **Be original and speak from the heart.** If possible, describe a personal experience or story, or select 1-2 provided talking points, **in your own words**, to support the main message.
- **Include a clear and specific action request.** "I urge you to..."

Sample Letter to your Senators

[write one letter to each Senator - use your own words, this is just a sample letter]

[Today's date]

Dear Senator _____,

I am a Unitarian Universalist from *[optional: name of congregation and location]*. I believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and my faith believes in the importance of the democratic process.

The right to vote is the bedrock of American democracy. I am concerned that increasingly barriers are being raised to keep people from voting, especially in areas with a history of racial discrimination. There are also barriers to equal access for voters with disabilities and for voters with limited-English proficiency. *[Insert personal experience, story, concern, or pick 1-2 talking points, in your own words, to support the message.]*

I urge you to work with Senators across the aisle to restore full protections of the Voting Rights Act so that all eligible American voters can freely exercise the privilege to vote.

Sincerely, *[YOUR NAME and include your **COMPLETE ADDRESS**]*

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