



Protecting the Right to Vote

During 2020, 158.4 million Americans, or 66% of registered voters -- a record number -- voted in the Presidential election. The election also saw record vote by mail numbers, with 46% of voters casting their ballots by mail, up from 25% in the 2016 election. However, in the aftermath of the 2020 elections, state legislatures around the country are proposing legislation that would make it more difficult to cast a ballot.

Forty-nine state legislatures have introduced over 440 bills to restrict voting access in a number of ways including limits to voting by mail, increased voter ID requirements, elimination of drop boxes to return mail ballots and restrictions to in-person early voting, while at least 19 states passed 34 laws restricting access to voting.

To combat these anti-democratic moves and ensure every citizen can exercise their constitutional right to vote no matter where they live, Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland introduced the For the People Act, H.R.1, which passed the House on March 3, 2021. A similar bill, S.1, was introduced in the Senate by Senator Jeff Merkley of Oregon, but was unable to advance as it failed a Senate cloture vote on June 22, 2021.

Representative Terri Sewell of Alabama reintroduced the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, H.R. 4, which would restore the Voting Rights Act, protecting the right to vote for people of color. This bill passed the House of Representatives on August 24, 2021 but failed to obtain cloture in the U.S. Senate on November 3, 2021.

Alliance for Retired Americans Position

The Alliance for Retired Americans supports the For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1), which ensures Americans' right to vote, and urges the U.S. Senate to pass it.

The Alliance for Retired Americans also supports the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4/S. 4), which restores the Voting Rights Act, protecting the right to vote for all Americans, particularly minorities.

The Alliance opposes any policy that will erect barriers or make it more difficult for all Americans, especially older Americans, to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

What does H.R. 1/S. 1 do?

- Expands voter registration to allow online and same day registration and widens access by allowing vote by mail and early voting;
- Requires states to use paper ballots, increasing election security;
- Limits the removal of voters from voter rolls;
- Imposes penalties for voter intimidation and dissemination of misinformation;
- Requires states to establish independent redistricting commissions to prevent partisan gerrymandering of congressional and state legislative districts;
- Increases election security and safeguards our democracy by increasing the security of voting machines and electronic election systems from cyber attacks.
- Prohibits political spending by foreign nationals and requires more disclosure of campaign spending and donors to political committees.
- Strengthens ethics requirements and conflict of interest standards for every branch of the federal government.
- Requires the President, Vice President and candidates for those offices to release 10 years of their tax returns.

What does H.R. 4/S. 4 do?

- Restores the Voting Rights Act, which was weakened by the Supreme Court in 2013, thereby protecting the right to vote of all Americans, including voters of color.
- Requires that states and jurisdictions that have multiple violations of the Voting Rights Act must be precleared by the Department of Justice or the U.S. District Court before making any changes to methods of elections, changes to jurisdictional boundaries, redistricting, changes to voting locations and opportunities and changes to voter registration lists.
- Increases transparency by requiring reasonable public notice for voting changes.
- Permits the U.S. Attorney General authority to request federal observers be present anywhere in the country where there is a serious threat of racial discrimination in voting.