

**12<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE POLICY CONFERENCE**  
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***THE DAMAGE DONE BY THE U.S. SUPREME COURT'S SHELBY COUNTY V. HOLDER DECISION IN 2013  
MUST BE IMMEDIATELY FIXED***

*The protection and expansion of voting rights has always been a bipartisan issue for our country, and Democrats and Republicans have an equal responsibility to make sure that no qualified voter is denied access to the voting booth.*

- ✓ When the U.S. Supreme Court issued its devastating 5-4 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013, it dealt a crushing blow to voting rights by removing important protections for voters who had suffered—and still suffer—historic disenfranchisement. We are now left with a Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) that is insufficient to protect our fundamental right to vote, particularly in those states and localities where racial discrimination in voting remains real, documented and ongoing.
- ✓ In 2014, the bipartisan “Voting Rights Amendment Act” (VRAA) was introduced as a first step to modernize and fix the damage that was done to voting rights by the Supreme Court’s *Shelby* decision. Yet, despite repeated calls for action by the civil rights community, we are extremely disappointed that not one hearing was held on this bill in the U.S. House of Representatives. *A bipartisan VRAA has been re-introduced this year and we call upon the House to immediately hold hearings so that Congress can move expeditiously on fixing the VRA!*

**Why We Need to Fix the Voting Rights Act after *Shelby***

The 2014 mid-term elections have taught us that voting discrimination remains a significant problem. The mid-term elections provide ample evidence of the need to immediately pass legislation to restore the protections of the Voting Rights Act that were struck down by the Supreme Court’s *Shelby* ruling. In their “Voting 2014: Stories from the States” series, the Brennan Center for Justice<sup>1</sup> found that in the 2014 election, new voting restrictions were in place in 21 states — 14 for the first time in a federal election. These laws ranged from voter ID requirements, to early voting cutbacks, to registration limits. For example:

- **Kansas's** strict photo ID rule and proof of citizenship requirement made it difficult for thousands of voters to cast ballots in the 2014 election.
- **Ohio** voters had fewer options for how to cast their ballots due to new restrictions on early voting, which had a particular impact on “Souls to the Polls” drives.
- **Texas** already has one of the nation’s lowest voter turnouts. Voters had to contend with the state’s new harsh photo ID law, which left many confused, disheartened, and even disenfranchised.

- Thousands of **Iowans** could not vote because of past criminal convictions, a burden that disproportionately falls on the state's African American population.

Additionally, a report<sup>ii</sup> by the Center for American Progress, LDF, and Southern Elections Foundation that focused on the impact of voting restrictions in **Texas, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia** shows that available evidence from the 2014 election season strongly suggests that the new restrictions on the right to vote disfranchised large numbers of voters.<sup>iii</sup>

***There is no better way to honor this year's 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 than to restore and strengthen the VRA with bipartisan legislation.*** In light of the raw reality that discrimination in voting is not a thing of the past, there is the "urgency of now" that calls upon Congress to act before we risk keeping more and more voters from the polls and inflicting additional damage to our democracy.

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<sup>i</sup>For the results of the Brennan Center for Justice's new series, "Voting 2014: Stories from the States," see: <http://www.brennancenter.org/state-voting-2014-states>

<sup>ii</sup>"The Battle to Protect the Vote, Voter Suppression Efforts in Five States and Their Effect on the 2014 Midterm Elections," by Ben Jealous and Ryan P. Haygood, Center for American Progress, LDF, Southern Elections Foundation, December 2014.

<sup>iii</sup>Ibid. p.2.