



Addressing Voting Rights, Voter Suppression and Racism

Approved by a vote of the JCRC at the March 20, 2024 meeting.

The Jewish people's commitment to voting rights is rooted in our sacred obligation to pursue justice, in our historical experiences, and in our commitment to cherished rights. A 2011 Jewish Council for Public Affairs resolution on elections began with the core premise that "The cornerstone of democracy is the election process." Unfortunately, the systematic disenfranchisement of key segments of the voting population continues to challenge the integrity of the elections process and undermine our democracy.

Many of our Jewish sages stress the importance of a community in which the people have a voice in the selection of leaders. As Rabbi Yitzhak taught, "A leader is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a).

Our historical experiences throughout the centuries as an often-persecuted minority subjected to the whims of unaccountable leaders also instilled in us an appreciation for the value of free elections. This is among the reasons for the American Jewish involvement in the civil and voting rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. It is also why our community was instrumental in the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act which sought to overturn decades of discrimination and intimidation at the ballot box.

The Voting Rights Act has been reauthorized four times, each time with bipartisan support in Congress. Each reauthorization was signed into law by Republican Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush.

Unfortunately, the Voting Rights Act was severely weakened by the Supreme Court's 2013 decision in *Shelby County v Holder*. The Court struck down Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act that contained a formula determining which jurisdictions with a history of disenfranchisement needed preclearance from the Department of Justice before making changes to voting laws or procedures. The effect has been to diminish the Voting Rights Act as multiple states quickly adopted new, restrictive voting laws that target low-income communities and communities of color. This is both a civil rights and a racial justice issue – and a Jewish concern to its core.

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) believes that the right to vote and participate in our democracy is a core American Jewish value—a civic and moral duty. The bedrock of our democratic process is the right of every eligible citizen to cast a ballot and have that ballot counted. Achieving a government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of its people is possible only through maximum citizen participation in the electoral process, and it is the duty of all who cherish democracy to ensure that all eligible citizens are afforded the opportunity to vote and have their votes counted.



Therefore, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater New Orleans supports taking the following action steps:

- Join existing election protection coalitions and partner with impacted communities to safeguard voting rights for all eligible citizens;
- Engage with state election officials to ensure the integrity of access to voting and seek, as well, to address existing voting practices that limit voting access.
- Oppose measures that have the intent or effect of unfairly limiting the right to vote, for example through reduced locally accessible polling locations, onerous voter identification laws, curtailed early voting, or other measures.
- In places where photo identification is required for voting, support measures to assist all eligible voters in obtaining necessary identification.
- Register voters, advocate for voting rights legislation, and educate the community about voter suppression.
- Support ballot initiatives and legislation that expands voting rights.
- Support inclusive census policies and forms;
- Oppose voter intimidation efforts;
- Advocate for equal access and adequate facilities to vote.

ABOUT: The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) is a standing committee of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans that serves as the Federation's advocacy and social action arm, engaging all segments of the Greater New Orleans Jewish community and connecting with non-Jewish individuals and groups in the region to promote Jewish values.

- The JCRC is made up of representatives from local Jewish organizations and members from the Jewish community at large.