

Legislation Text

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The City Council of Philadelphia calls on our Congressional Representatives and Federal Government to support the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

WHEREAS, Following the Civil War, Congress adopted the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment establishing the citizenship rights of all persons born in the United States and requiring that no one be denied due process or equal protection of the laws, and the Fifteenth Amendment securing the right to vote for all citizens regardless of a person's race, color, or former condition of servitude; and

WHEREAS, Despite the enactment of these significant constitutional commands, for nearly 100 years, states and local jurisdictions passed laws and instituted practices designed to circumvent the Civil War amendments; many states erected barriers to access to the polls, including infamous poll taxes and literacy or good character tests; African-Americans, Latinos, and other minorities and those who advocated on their behalf often were subjected to severe violence and intimidation, or in some cases death, if they attempted to register to vote or cast a ballot; and

WHEREAS, Confronted with aggressive and relentless defiance of the Constitution, Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in order to ensure that the rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were enforced; and

WHEREAS, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is widely viewed as one of the most successful civil rights statutes ever enacted; It bans literacy tests and other discriminatory devices, outlaws discriminatory practices and procedures during the voting process, authorizes the appointment of federal election monitors and observers, and creates various means for protecting and enforcing the rights of American citizens, including racial and language minorities, to vote; and

WHEREAS, Although the struggle to ensure fairness in the electoral process continues, as a result of the Voting Rights Act racial and language minorities have enjoyed enhanced opportunities to participate in the electoral process, cast votes, and elect their candidates of choice; and

WHEREAS, In 2007, certain "special provisions" of the Voting Rights Act that were enacted to address discriminatory voting practices and the present effects of those practices could expire if not renewed by Congress; and

WHEREAS, By 2007, Congress will vote on whether to extend these "special provisions" of the Voting Rights Act; the effects of the long history of voting discrimination persist; the "special provisions" of the Voting Rights Act continue to be extremely important tools for protecting minority citizens in voting; during the reauthorization process, Congress has compiled a record that sets forth the continuing effects of the nation's widespread voting discrimination; and

WHEREAS, Voting is the cornerstone of American democracy and, during the reauthorization process, Congress and individuals and organizations concerned with maintaining the protections that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provides will have an opportunity to present the evidence necessary to support renewal of the

"special provisions" of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; in the meantime, all eligible voters should register, confirm their registration status, and exercise the right to vote so that the long struggle to expand the franchise yields meaningful results; now therefore

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Calling upon our Federal Legislators to vote to reauthorize the "special provisions" of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, now known as the "Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006".