

Legislation Text

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Commemorating the 55th Anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act.

WHEREAS, The conversation regarding full rights of citizenship for African Americans has been ongoing since the first slaves survived the journey to America in 1619; and

WHEREAS, The discussion of citizenship continued into the debates of the Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention, and resulted in a compromise whereby Black people were counted as three-fifths of a human being in the United State Constitution; and

WHEREAS, In 1870, the 15th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, which stated that “[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude”; and

WHEREAS, Despite its passage, discriminatory practices were implemented beginning in the late 1870’s to keep Black people from practicing their rights as citizens. These tactics included violence, fraud, poll taxes, literacy tests, restrictive and arbitrary registration practices, and white primaries; and

WHEREAS, For the next 80 years, African American leaders fought for the right to full citizenship and the right to vote. Organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Council of Churches, the NAACP, the National Urban League, the United Auto Workers, and a wide variety of activists, writers, actors, students and others worked together and fought white supremacy and intolerance for the right to vote; and

WHEREAS, On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law, removing all restrictions for Black people and finally giving them full citizenship. The passage of this legislation is considered the single greatest achievement of the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr; and

WHEREAS, In the 55 years since its passage, tens of thousands of Black people across the United States have been elected to public office, including six United States Senators and our nation’s first Black president; and

WHEREAS; The 55th Anniversary serves as a constant reminder that young people made the Act possible. These heroes include John Lewis, Bob Moses, Judy Richardson, Diane Nash, James Forman, James Bevel, James Orange, Martin Luther King, Jr., and hundreds of young college students from across the United States who participated in Freedom Summer; and

WHEREAS, Much blood was spilled in efforts to give Black people the right to vote. On this 55th Anniversary we remember the martyrs who died so we could vote, including Herbert Lee, Medgar Evans, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Henry Schwerner, Rev. James Reeb, Jonathan Daniels, Vernon Dehmer, Viola Liuzzo, and Octavius Catto; and

WHEREAS, The 55th Anniversary reminds us that in November 2020, we must honor our ancestors and continue the legacy of the late Representative John Lewis. We must prepare to use what Rep. Lewis called “the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy” - our vote. The late Congressman reminded us all that it is imperative that we “have the capacity and the ability to redeem the soul of this nation and set in on the right course.” In the most important election in this country’s history, we must all continue our fight to restore democracy by registering to vote and encouraging our family, friends, and neighbors to vote; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Recognizes the heroes who engaged in the struggle that resulted in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby urges U.S. Senators Bob Casey Jr. and Patrick Toomey Jr. to support The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which bolsters protections against discriminatory practices in voting and seeks to protect all Americans’ right to vote.

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Joins with civil rights icon Harry Belafonte, Danny Glover, Rob Reiner, Tony Shalhoub, our local and state political leadership, and Blackballotpower.com in calling upon all citizens of voting age to register to vote and vote on Tuesday, November 3, 2020.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution are forwarded to Senator Bob Casey Jr. and Senator Patrick Toomey Jr.