

January 28, 2022

Honorable United States Senators:

The late Congressman John Lewis once stated, "The right to vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool or instrument in a democratic society. We must use it."

In the national, state, and local elections held since Congressman Lewis' death, millions of citizens from across the country have exercised this precious right, in some cases at historic levels, even in the midst of an ongoing global pandemic. For its part, the charitable sector has played a key role in encouraging and helping communities participate in the voting process, uplifting the importance of active civic engagement.

A strong democracy thrives when all can participate in this sacred act, unencumbered. And while participation in voting has increased, we have also seen systemic inequities in electoral processes and in laws passed making it more difficult for some Americans, specifically voters of color, to vote. While America has made strides in the past to rectify racial discrimination, these intentionally restrictive voting laws represent a shift backward in our quest for equity and justice for all.

As you continue your work in this new year, [United Philanthropy Forum](https://unitedphilforum.org) and the undersigned group of philanthropy-serving organizations, foundations, and nonprofits from across the country urge you to come together to address these problems through legislation amending the Voting Rights Act of 1965. All of us working in the charitable sector know that the well-being of all Americans, and all communities, is inextricably linked to their ability to exercise their right to vote. Last year, the House of Representatives passed the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. This year, we support the ongoing work of the Senate to do the same.

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would restore the strength of the 1965 Voting Rights Act by requiring jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination in voting to receive approval from the Department of Justice before making changes to their voting rules. This provision was eliminated by the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*.

Passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would also establish a more transparent and accountable system for states to report election law changes, ensuring that voters of color who remain the targets of voter suppression have fair and unrestricted access to the democratic process.

Congressman Lewis dedicated his life to advancing civil and human rights for all Americans, recognizing injustices when he saw them and calling them out. "Since the Shelby decision, voter discrimination is on the rise," Lewis said in a press release in August 2018. "Thousands of people of color are being systematically denied access to the ballot box, many of whom have voted all their lives."

The charitable sector joins the late Congressman Lewis in calling out the voting rights injustices that persist today and urges you to make passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act a top priority in 2022.

Respectfully,

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## About the Forum

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*As the largest and most diverse network in American philanthropy, [United Philanthropy Forum](#) holds a unique position in the social sector to help increase philanthropy's impact in communities across the country. We are a membership network of more than 90 regional and national philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs), representing more than 7,000 funders, who work to make philanthropy better.*

*Our [public policy work](#) helps the Forum address racial inequities, advocate on behalf of the sector, and identify practical public policy solutions that catalyze a just and equitable society where all can participate and prosper.*