



November 23, 2020

To: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate

From: Virginia Kase, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Support for the For the People Act (H.R. 1, S. 949) in the 117th Congress

Dear Senator or Representative:

The League of Women Voters of the United States writes in strong support of the *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949), the transformational democracy reform package that would help return power to everyday American families. We strongly urge you to prioritize passage of this pro-voter, anti-corruption legislation in the 117th Congress. Along with the passage of the *For the People Act*, Congress must also prioritize the *John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act* (H.R.4) and legislation granting statehood to Washington, D.C. (H.R.51).

Throughout our nearly 100-year history, the League of Women Voters has worked to “level the playing field” of our election system by registering new citizens to vote, fighting unfair district maps in court, and advocating in Congress for fair election processes. The 2020 election underscores the urgent need for transformational democracy reform. Across the nation, Americans experienced unprecedented voter suppression, historic levels of dark money spent to drown out the voices of everyday Americans, and rampant ethical abuses by special interests. One sweeping bill, the *For the People Act*, addresses many of these problems. This historic legislation passed the House of Representatives with unanimous Democratic support in March 2019 and was cosponsored by all members of the Senate Democratic Caucus.

The League of Women Voters is very excited at the prospect of the reintroduction and the final passage of the *For the People Act* because it aims to include elements that align with many of the League’s long-held positions, like election modernization and redistricting reform. LWV is advocating for the prioritization of the following essential elements of the bill:



1. RESTORE THE VRA

Restoring the *Voting Rights Act* will strengthen our elections by cutting back the obstructive laws that have kept eligible voters from exercising their right at the ballot box.

Since the Supreme Court's Shelby County decision rolled back key provisions of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, we have seen the process of voting become more challenging, especially for women and communities of color. In recent elections, voters have faced a variety of obstacles, from reduced polling places to long lines, to strict voter identification requirements, to the removal of registered voters from the rolls. The *Voting Rights Act* was created to ensure that every American has an equal right to vote. HR1 includes strong support for restoring the provisions to strengthen voting rights and protect all eligible Americans at the ballot box.

2. IMPLEMENT FAIR REDISTRICTING

It is time to end gerrymandering once and for all so that voters select their elected officials – not the other way around. Additionally, without passage of the *John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act*, this will be the first redistricting cycle conducted without the full protections of the VRA.

Across the country, in legislatures, in court, and on the ballot, the League has fought against efforts by politicians of both major parties to draw unfair election maps to keep power in their own hands. Gerrymandering silences the voters and residents of disputed districts, who, instead of electing officials to represent their interests, are selected by the politicians working to serve themselves. HR1 should establish clear rules around state redistricting processes so that maps can be drawn fairly. These provisions, combined with the restoration of the *Voting Rights Act*, will ensure fair and equal representation for all people across the country.

3. EXPAND VOTER REGISTRATION

We must modernize the registration process through the expansion of automatic voter registration, online voter registration, and same day registration. Just this election we saw how these provisions led to increased voter turnout that benefitted both parties.



As election observers and partners in Election Protection, the League has seen first-hand the current problems with our election system that prevent participation of eligible voters in our elections: complicated registration and deadlines that vary by state and county, wrongfully purged voters, recounting processes and audits with an increased number of provisional ballots. HR1 should modernize our voter registration processes, which would go a long way in addressing these barriers.

4. CREATE A NEW PUBLIC FINANCING SYSTEM

We need to rebalance our system so that Big Money doesn't set Washington's agenda or decide who gets a seat at the table.

Corruption occurs in Washington when wealthy donors and powerful interests use political money to buy influence. Without the creation of a new public financing system, there is no way to end Washington corruption. Passing small-donor, citizen-funded campaign programs -- a simple, proven solution that amplifies everyday voters' voice in our elections-- will ensure ordinary people can run for office without relying on Big Money to participate.

The common-sense reforms in the *For the People Act*, which are deeply popular and have passed in many states and localities, cover the necessary structural democracy reform, our nation needs to be able to fully address important substantive priorities for the American people, such as expanding affordable healthcare and stopping the spread of COVID-19, protecting the environment, and creating millions of good-paying jobs. This legislation, combined with the *John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act* (H.R.4) and legislation granting statehood to Washington, D.C. (H.R.51) must be the first priorities of the next Congress.

The League is proud to be an active coalition partner in ensuring that HR1 maintains the bold democracy reforms and voter protections that are necessary to level the playing field for everyone. We call on all legislators, no matter their party affiliation, to support any such legislation that is indisputably by and for the people.