



October 15, 2021

Senator Chuck Grassley
111 7th Avenue SE, Box 13
Suite 6800
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

Dear Senator Grassley:

I write as the national president of the League of Women Voters of the United States, and as a native Iowan, to discuss the critical importance of the right to vote for all Americans. As the national League leader, I have watched as League members from all across the country have stood up for voters, working to ensure that they are able to cast ballots, no matter where they live, what they look like, or what language they speak. There is growing urgency to pass the *Freedom to Vote Act* and the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act* in Congress. These bills are essential to counter the unprecedented wave of anti-voter laws advancing in the states and to protect Americans from unnecessary barriers to the ballot.

Our democracy is facing an existential crisis that requires swift bipartisan action. As the 2020 election cycle, the violent assault on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, and the recent surge in anti-voter state legislation have made abundantly clear, our democracy is vulnerable and in dire need of protection. Already, multiple states have rolled back early and mail voting, added new hurdles for voter registration, limited or eliminated ballot drop boxes, imposed burdensome and unnecessary voter identification requirements, stripped power from state and local election officials, and taken other steps to silence voters' voices. These restrictions are consistently found to burden voters of color significantly and disproportionately. That disproportionate burden is well-documented at every stage of voting.¹

In your prepared statement for the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on the Right to Vote on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, you asserted, "We should all agree that participating in American democracy at the ballot box is a fundamental right. It's a right we should want to protect, and it should not become a political football."² On the Senate Floor in 2019, you recounted the story of your mother, a proud member of the League of Women Voters, being one of the first few women to vote in Iowa. You said, "Let us also pay tribute to our founding mothers who fought and

¹ Johnson, Theodore R., & Feldman, Max. "The New Voter Suppression." *Brennan Center for Justice*. January 16, 2020. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-voter-suppression>; Solomon, D., Maxwell, C., & Castro, A. "Systemic Inequality and American Democracy." *Center for American Progress*. August 7, 2019.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/473003/systematic-inequality-american-democracy/>; "Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote." *The Leadership Conference Education Fund*. September 2019. <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/reports/Democracy-Diverted.pdf>.

² Grassley, Chuck "Grassley Statement at a Hearing on Voting Rights" April 20, 2021, <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/grassley-statement-at-a-hearing-on-voting-rights>

secured these cherished blessings of freedom and liberty for their daughters and granddaughters yet.”³ Right now, the right to vote that so many, including your mother, worked tirelessly to secure and protect is under threat as state lawmakers across the country — including in Iowa — advance legislation to create barriers to the ballot box.

Earlier this year, Gov. Kim Reynolds signed legislation cutting the state's early voting period and closing the polls an hour earlier on Election Day, just months after Iowans voted in record numbers.⁴ Iowa has also introduced a reduction in the time that absentee ballots will be counted, restrictions on who can drop off absentee ballots, and changes in drop box locations.⁵ The justification for this new push in voting legislation is voter fraud. However, the motivation for fighting vote fraud in Iowa conflicts with the lack of evidence of widespread voter fraud in the state. These laws only make it more difficult for people to vote, making it harder for Iowans to exercise this fundamental right. Now is the time to act.

Protecting the right to vote freely and without discrimination has long been a bipartisan priority. The *Voting Rights Act of 1965* was passed with leadership from both the Republican and Democratic parties, and the subsequent reauthorizations of its enforcement provisions were signed into law each time by Republican presidents.⁶ This history of bipartisan support extends to the Iowa delegation. In 2006, following an exhaustive review of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness and continued need of the *Voting Rights Act*, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization bill into law after the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved the measure and the Senate passed it unanimously.⁷ This unanimous vote included the votes of both Iowa Senators: Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and you yourself.⁸ The law’s history is truly one of bipartisan cooperation. We must continue that legacy today.

As the head of an organization dedicated to the protection of the freedom to vote, I share your interest in safe and accessible elections. That is why the League has been working to urge members of Congress to support the *Freedom to Vote Act* and the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act*. While states will continue to administer and run elections, the Freedom to Vote Act would set national standards for federal elections that make voting options equally accessible to Americans in all 50 states. It would also negate most of the worst anti-voter laws being proposed and passed right now. Meanwhile, the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act* will reverse the damage done by the Supreme Court’s majority in *Shelby County v. Holder*

³ Grassley, Chuck, “Grassley Recalls Story Of His Mother Being Among First To Vote After 19th Amendment Ratified” June 2019

<https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-recalls-story-his-mother-being-among-first-vote-after-19th-amendment>

⁴ Gruber-Miller, Stephen, “Gov. Kim Reynolds signs law shortening Iowa's early and Election Day voting”

”, March 8, 2021 <https://www.wmbfnews.com/2021/05/04/activists-republicans-clash-over-sc-voting-rights-expansion-bill/>

⁵ White, Lauren, “Breaking down Iowa’s newest election laws”, June 16, 2021

<https://dailyiowan.com/2021/06/16/breaking-down-iowas-newest-election-laws/>

⁶ “Voting Rights Act: Major Dates in History.” *ACLU*. <https://www.aclu.org/voting-rights-act-major-dates-history>.

⁷ “All Information (Except Text) for H.R.9 - Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006.” *Congress.gov*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/9/all-info#allActions-content>.

⁸ Govtrack.us, “H.R. 9 (109th): Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006”

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/109-2006/s212>

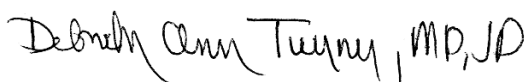
and *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* by updating the *Voting Rights Act* to address modern patterns of racial discrimination at the ballot box.

In short, the *Freedom to Vote Act* and the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act* each fill a distinct and critical role in protecting the freedom to vote and ensuring elections are safe and accessible. When it comes to our elections, we all want a transparent process we can trust, where Americans have equal freedom to vote, whether we live in a small town or big city, or the coasts or the Midwest. Only passage of both the *Freedom to Vote Act* and the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act* can make the promise of a democracy that works for — and includes — us all a reality.

The national discussion about the right to vote freely and without discrimination must be elevated above the bitter partisanship that has come to define so much of our modern politics. When we allow this rancor to fester — and worse, when we allow it to define our healthy debate of critical issues — all people in America lose. As you consider the legacy you will leave for generations of Iowans, and in the spirit of bipartisanship that expanded the franchise after centuries of violent prejudice and exclusion, we urge you to join with your colleagues in passing these bills that are broadly popular across the country and so critical to the future of our nation.⁹

Thank you for considering our request for a meeting to discuss the state of voting rights and a path forward for the nation. The eyes of history are upon us. Your leadership in this moment carries great weight, and we look forward to working together to fulfill the promise of our democracy for all. I, like you, believe in the greatness of this country. I, like you, believe that the right to vote is a fundamental right and must be protected, and I, like you, know that in times of crisis Iowans have always stepped forward and done the right thing.

Thank you for your time,



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⁹ Lake, C., Mermin, D., Juetten, J., & Sanchez, J. “Recent research shows strong public support for the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.” *Lake Research Partners*. April 22, 2021. <https://votingrightslab.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Lake-Research-Partners-Federal-Polling-Memo-April-2021.pdf>.