



ACTION ALERT

DATE: January 25, 2013

TO: Concerned Parties

FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

SUPPORT LEGISLATION TO EXPAND ACCESS TO VOTING PROCESSES AND PROTECT VOTERS FROM SUPPRESSION, DECEPTION, AND OTHER FORMS OF DISENFRANCHISEMENT

H.R. 12 / S. 123, THE VOTER EMPOWERMENT ACT, WOULD ALSO EXPAND ELIGIBILITY TO EX-FELONY OFFENDERS TO VOTE ONCE THEY LEAVE PRISON

THE ISSUE:

In a time when numerous states are considering or have already enacted legislation to restrict or suppress voter participation, Congressman John Lewis (GA) and 165 of his colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives have introduced **H.R. 12, the *Voter Empowerment Act***. Senator Kristen Gillibrand (NY) has introduced a companion bill in the Senate (**S. 123**). This important legislation would expand and protect voters' access to the polls and would increase accountability and integrity among election officials and poll workers. It also would expand eligibility to allow all ex-offenders who have been released from prison (even those who may still be on probation or parole) to register and vote in federal elections.

Specifically, the ***Voter Empowerment Act*** would:

- guarantee early voting – require that every state establish early voting sites that are open at least 15 days prior to a general election day;
- require automatic registration – the bill would use modern technology to automatically and permanently register all eligible voters;
- allow same-day registration throughout the country – H.R. 12 / S. 123 would ensure allow voters to register to vote on election day at their polling place;
- ensure on-line voter registration – the *Voter Empowerment Act* would ensure that on-line voter registration is a viable option nationally;
- outlaw “voter caging” – makes illegal a practice by which mail is sent to a registered voter's address and, if the mail is returned as “undeliverable” or if it is delivered and the voter does not respond, his or her registration is challenged;
- clarify and strengthen the use of provisional ballots – ensures that provisional ballots are counted;
- make voter intimidation and deception punishable by law – with strong and tough penalties so that people who commit these crimes suffer more than just a slap on the wrist, and establish a process for reaching out to misinformed voters with accurate information so they can cast their votes in time;
- re-enfranchise ex-offenders – H.R. 12 / S. 123 incorporates the provisions of the NAACP–supported “Democracy Restoration Act” by allowing ex-offenders, once they are out of prison, the opportunity to register and vote in federal elections without challenges or complication;
- encourage youth voters – the *Voter Empowerment Act* requires colleges and universities to offer and encourage voter registration to all students;
- assure voting by overseas residents – H.R. 12 / S. 123 increases assurances that Americans who may be living overseas, especially those serving our country in the armed services, can cast a valid vote and be assured that their vote was counted.

**THE NAACP STRONGLY SUPPORTS H.R. 12 / S. 123, THE VOTER EMPOWERMENT ACT, AND
URGES ITS IMMEDIATE ENACTMENT INTO LAW.**

More...

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative and both your Senators and **URGE THEM TO CO-SPONSOR AND ACTIVELY SUPPORT H.R. 12 / S. 123, THE VOTER EMPOWERMENT ACT.** To contact your Senators and Representative, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Senators and your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senators'/Congressman's offices. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write letters to your Senators, send them to:
The Honorable (name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Senators' or Representative's offices (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for their fax numbers (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Senators, go to www.senate.gov; click on "*Find Your Senators*". Look up your Senators by state; go to their web sites for e-mail addresses. To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "*Write Your Representative*" (on the left hand side, just under "find your Representative"). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT BOTH YOUR SENATORS!!!!

THE MESSAGE

- The right of all eligible citizens to vote and to have their vote count is the cornerstone of our democracy, and it is a fundamental civil right guaranteed by our Constitution.
- It is the obligation of Congress to guarantee that everything that can be done will be done to ensure that every eligible American is allowed to vote and to be sure that his or her vote has been counted.
- We need to ensure that that every eligible voter is registered and votes, and that eligibility is opened to all Americans age 18 or over, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, geographical location, disability or other characteristic which may place them in a minority status.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!

If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

MEMBERSHIP IS POWER! JOIN THE NAACP TODAY.

To become an NAACP member or to sign up for e-mail legislative and press updates, visit www.naacp.org

Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States Senate / House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510 / 20515

RE: SUPPORT FOR H.R. 12 / S. 123, THE *VOTER EMPOWERMENT ACT*

Dear Senator / Representative _____;

As your constituent, I strongly urge you to co-sponsor and support, HR. 12 / S. 123, the *Voter Empowerment Act*. The right of all eligible citizens to vote and to have their vote count is the cornerstone of our democracy, and it is a fundamental civil right guaranteed by our Constitution. Furthermore, it is the obligation of Congress to ensure that everything that can be done will be done to ensure that every eligible American is allowed to vote and to be sure that his or her vote has been counted.

HR. 12 / S. 123, the *Voter Empowerment Act*, mandates many of the very issues that the NAACP has determined as being vital to increasing voter participation throughout our nation. In addition to guaranteed early voting throughout the country with no excuse required, H.R. 12 / S. 123 would use modern technology to automatically and permanently register all eligible voters; allow same-day registration nationally; ensure secure on-line voter registration; outlaw "voter caging"; clarify and strengthen the use of provisional ballots; make voter intimidation and deception punishable by law, with strong and tough penalties so that people who commit these crimes suffer more than just a slap on the wrist, and establish a process for reaching out to misinformed voters with accurate information so they can cast their votes in time; allow ex-offenders, once they are out of prison, the opportunity to register and vote in federal elections without challenges or complication; encourage youth voters; and increase assurances that Americans who may be living overseas, especially those serving our country in the armed services, can cast a valid vote and be assured that their vote was counted.

I would again urge you, in the strongest terms possible, to co-sponsor and support H.R. 12 / S. 123, the *Voter Empowerment Act*. I look forward to working with you to see that every eligible voter is registered and votes, and that eligibility is opened to all Americans age 18 or over, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, geographic location, disability or other quality which may place them in a minority. Please contact me in the near future to let me know what you are doing to promote the important goal of increased voter participation and what I can do to help.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)

***Remember to contact your
Representative and BOTH
your Senators.***