

House Democrats Introduce Voter Empowerment Act

Bill Ensures Equal Access to the Ballot Box, Protects Integrity of Voting Systems, Ensures Accountability in Elections

Today, House Democrats introduced the Voter Empowerment Act, comprehensive voting rights legislation to modernize our voter registration system, ensure equal access to the ballot box for all Americans and prohibit voter caging and other deceptive practices that keep people from exercising their constitutional right to vote. The bill will protect voters from restrictive voting measures that have been enacted in states across the country over the last year. These measures make it harder for millions of eligible voters to register or vote, and disproportionately affect our service members, the disabled, minorities, young people, seniors, and low-income Americans.

With a pivotal presidential election just six months away, we must do all we can to ensure free and fair elections and that everyone can vote. However, access to registration and to the ballot remains a problem:

- Around **three million Americans were turned away** from the polls in the 2008 Presidential election due to voter registration problems.
- **One in four voters – an estimated 51 million Americans eligible to vote – are not registered.**
- The Department of Defense Inspector General has repeatedly noted a **persistent failure of the Federal Voting Assistance Program** to provide effective assistance to military voters, specifically identifying a **lack of voter awareness of existing resources** to assist in the process.
- In 2009, **a majority of polling places still had one or more impediments** that could prevent an individual with a disability from casting their ballot.

But instead of making it easier to register and vote, state legislatures across the country have made deliberate and systematic attempts to roll back access to the ballot, including laws that:

- **Make voter registration more difficult for eligible voters:**
 - At least 16 states have introduced bills to end Election Day and same-day voter registration and reduce other registration opportunities.
 - Florida, Illinois, and Texas passed laws restricting voter registration drives.
 - Ohio ended its weeklong period of same-day registration.

- **Reduce early and absentee voting:**

- At least nine states introduced bills to reduce their early voting periods, and Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia enacted those bills.
- Four states introduced bills to reduce absentee voting opportunities.

But Democrats will not sit idly by. To that end, we have put forward the Voter Empowerment Act, which:

- **Opens access to the ballot box by:**

- Modernizing the voter registration system
- Authorizing an online registration option
- Authorizing same-day registration and permitting voters to update their registration data onsite
- Providing additional tools to alleviate any additional burdens for people with disabilities
- Requiring all universities that receive federal funds to offer and encourage voter registration to their students
- Simplifying registration and ensuring that ballots from all military personnel serving overseas are counted

- **Ensures integrity of process by:**

- Authorizing funds for training poll workers and setting standards for polling place practices
- Requiring provisional ballots be available and counted at all polling places
- Prohibiting voter caging and designating it as a felony
- Protecting against deceptive practices and intimidation

- **Protects accountability of result by:**

- Establishing a national voter hotline to ensure timely reporting and corrective action of voting related issues
- Setting standards for voting machines to ensure accurate tabulation and confirmation of voter intent paper copy verification
- Reauthorizing the Election Assistance Commission to ensure that the highest standards are being met nationwide to guarantee fair elections