



NEWS RELEASE
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Media Contact: Lenore Ostrowsky
publicaffairs@usccr.gov
(202) 376-8591

U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

Washington, DC – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights celebrates with all Americans the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibits racial discrimination in voting. The law was signed by President Lyndon Johnson on August 6, 1965 and enforced the right to vote guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. It newly enfranchised many minority citizens who despite the 14th and 15th Amendments had been denied access to the polls by state and local officials in certain states.

The new law authorized the federal government to assume control over the voter registration process in any state or voting district that in 1964 had employed literacy or other qualifying test and in which fewer than half of voting age residents had either registered or voted. The Commission is proud of the fact its recommendations resulted in much of the language of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as well as the protections for language minorities enacted in 1975, and over the years conducting various oversight and enforcement efforts to ensure that federal agencies charged with doing so fully enforced the protections of the Act.

The Act almost immediately enabled large numbers of African-Americans and other minorities to vote, and was hugely successful in increasing minority voter turnout. It was also successful in allowing a dramatic increase in the number of minority persons elected to Congress. Many who worked, risked their lives, and sacrificed so much to bring it about, consider it the most successful civil rights law ever passed.

Although the Voting Rights Act has undergone changes from both the courts and Congress since its passage, it remains a powerful tool to combat discrimination in one of the most important aspects of American life: the right to vote without intimidation or fear regardless of race or color. By a vote of the majority of the Commission, however, we support the restoration of the protections of Section 4(b) of the Act struck down in *Shelby v. Holder*.

Chairman Castro states, “The Voting Rights Act of 1965 literally transformed this nation over the course of the last half century. I’m proud of the work the Commission has performed over the years to ensure the Act’s continued impact. However, today, more than at any time since its passage, a majority of the Commission see renewed efforts by states to limit the franchise, so we must rededicate ourselves to strengthening our democracy by once again strengthening the Voting Rights Act. By a vote of a majority of the Commission we call upon Congress to enact the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015.”

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing a federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about Commission’s reports and meetings, visit <http://www.usccr.gov>.