

NJVRA NOW

March 11, 2026

Dear Governor Sherrill and Lieutenant Governor Caldwell,

This past weekend marked 61 years since the great late John Lewis was brutally beaten crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama for the right to vote. His sacrifice and that of the other foot soldiers that day was not in vain. In August of that year, the landmark 1965 federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) was passed, which not only delivered on the promise of the Fifteenth Amendment to protect voters of color from racial discrimination in voting, but was also wildly successful in doing so. The federal VRA increased voter turnout and decreased racial disparity in voting for decades.

After years of significant erosion, however, including in 2013, when the U.S. Supreme Court tore out the heart of the VRA in *Shelby County v. Holder*, federal protections for our voting rights are on life support. With the Supreme Court being urged by the current presidential administration to gut core provisions of the VRA in *Louisiana v. Callais*, the escalation of other dangerous, anti-democracy assaults like the SAVE and MEGA Acts, the demand for states—including, as of last week, New Jersey—to turn over their voter rolls, the threat from President Trump to forcibly federalize election administration, and other voter suppression tactics, the situation has only become more urgent.

Governor Sherrill, we know you understand this threat. As a member of Congress, you admirably stood alongside Congressman Lewis as a co-sponsor of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. **You now have the opportunity to continue that legacy by urging the legislature to immediately pass New Jersey's own voting rights act, and making it the first piece of legislation you sign in your first 100 days in office.**

Last November, New Jersey voters showed up to the polls in record numbers. Voter turnout was the highest it has been in more than two decades. Across the state, New Jerseyans made it clear that they want their voices to be heard.

Unfortunately, New Jersey voters may not be able to depend on the same level of federal protections going forward.

Our democracy is under attack and voters are asking: What is being done to save it?

The answer is clear.

We, the undersigned, call on you to urge the legislature to pass, and sign into law, [A1715/S282](#), the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey (NJVRA). This critical bill would protect voters of color in New Jersey and strengthen our state democracy as voting rights continue to be decimated on the federal level.

At its height, the federal VRA protected and expanded the right to vote by outlawing literacy tests, challenging poll taxes, making obstruction of voter registration illegal, establishing language assistance requirements, and requiring jurisdictions with previous histories of racial discrimination to obtain “preclearance” from the U.S. Department of Justice or a court before changing any voting practices or procedures.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court has steadily weakened those protections. The Court’s decisions over the past decade have gutted the preclearance requirement and subsequently allowed states and localities to enact discriminatory voting regulations and practices that have contributed to growing voter suppression across the country. They have also made it increasingly difficult for voters to bring action when they do experience discrimination at the polls. Arguments before the Supreme Court in *Louisiana v. Callais* last October made it clear that opponents are seeking to undercut core protections of the federal VRA. The decision in *Callais* could come out any day.

New Jersey voters, especially voters of color, already face serious challenges while trying to vote. Late poll openings, long lines, barriers to physical access to polling locations, voter intimidation at the polls, and lack of language accessibility, among other obstacles, make voting onerous and difficult for many. These barriers disproportionately impact Black, Latina/Latino, Asian American and Arab communities, as well as young voters, older voters, voters with disabilities and voters in impoverished areas of the state. The end result is a form of voter suppression, and widespread disillusionment among these voters in our elections and democracy.

New Jersey voters, especially voters of color, showed up at the polls in November and proved they *want* to be heard and participate in our democracy—but they can’t do that if they can’t properly access their right to vote or, indeed, are afraid of exercising it.

New Jerseyans deserve a state voting rights act that codifies existing federal voting rights protections and:

- Establishes a New Jersey preclearance program that makes local governments with a history of discrimination prove that certain changes they make to the voting process will not harm voters of color before those changes can go into effect;
- Provides legal tools to fight discriminatory voting rules and procedures in court;
- Expands language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency;
- Includes strong protections against voter intimidation, deception or obstruction at the polls; and
- Ensures local and state voting procedures and policies do not deny voters of color and other protected categories of voters the right to cast their vote.

Fiercely protecting New Jersey voters at a time when our democracy and our right to vote is being imperiled by the federal government would position New Jersey, and your Administration, as a national leader and bulwark against the ongoing attacks on our democracy. It would also deliver on Lieutenant Caldwell’s inspiring promise to defend voting rights, protect the integrity of our elections and ensure that every eligible New Jerseyan can participate freely, safely and confidently.

Saving our democracy cannot wait. We therefore urge you to pass and sign into law the John Lewis Act within your first 100 days.

Sincerely,

AAPI New Jersey

American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU-NJ)

Action Together New Jersey (ATNJ)

Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice

Black Lives Matter Paterson

BlueWaveNJ

Campaign Legal Center (CLC)

Council on American-Islamic Relations of New Jersey (CAIR-NJ)

Deliver My Vote

Disability Rights New Jersey

Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School

Emgage

End Citizens United//Let America Vote Action Fund

Fairshare Housing

FairVote Action

Faith in New Jersey

Garden State Bar Association

Indivisible Cranbury

Indivisible NWI

Initiate Justice

Latino Action Network Foundation

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Lawyers for Equal Access to Advocacy & Dignity (LEAAD)

League of Women Voters of NJ (LWVNJ)

Legal Defense Fund (LDF)

Make the Road New Jersey

March for Our Lives New Jersey

Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America

NAACP Gloucester County

NAACP New Brunswick

NAACP NJ State Conference

National Association of Social Workers - NJ Chapter

National Council of Jewish Women Bergen County Section

New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice (NJAIJ)

New Jersey Black Empowerment Coalition (NJBEC)

New Jersey Clergy Coalition for Justice
New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children
New Jersey DemCast
New Jersey Federation of Democratic Women
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ)
New Jersey League of Conservation Voters (NJLCV)
New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP)
New Jersey Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC-NJ)
New Jersey Working Families Party
Newark Communities for Accountable Policing
Newark Community Street Team
NJ 11th For Change
NJ Citizen Action
Palestinian American Community Center
People's Organization for Progress (POP)
Prisoners Legal Advocacy Network (PLAN)
Reproductive Health Access Project - New Jersey Cluster
Returning Citizens Support Group
Salvation and Social Justice
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Social Justice Matters, Inc.
South Jersey NOW Alice Paul Chapter
Stand Up America
Students Demand Action
Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ
The Urban Health Collaborative
The Urban Political Pipeline and Advocacy Network
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Women for Progress
Women of Color Coalition
Working Families Party
YWCA Northern New Jersey

cc:

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson
Senator Shirley Turner