



STATEMENT OF THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

RULES COMMITTEE SENATE DEMOCRATS

SPOTLIGHT HEARING ON: “PROTECTING THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: AN EXAMINATION OF TRUMP AND PARTISAN ATTACKS ON VOTING AND ELECTIONS”

MAY 14, 2025

Ranking Member Padilla and Democrats of the Senate Rules Committee: On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we thank you for holding this critical hearing and for the opportunity to submit a statement. We commend Ranking Member Padilla and certain members of the committee for holding this important forum to examine recent efforts that threaten the integrity and accessibility of our elections. The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act and President Trump’s anti-voter executive order, “Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections,” represent a troubling escalation in partisan attempts to restrict access to the ballot, particularly for voters of color, young voters, voters with low incomes, and other historically marginalized voters. These measures risk undermining public confidence in our election systems and weakening the nonpartisan foundation of election administration. As Congress considers its role in safeguarding democratic institutions, it is vital to reject policies that disenfranchise eligible voters under the pretext of election security.

We offer this statement to express our thoughts regarding the impact of recent legislative and executive efforts — specifically the SAVE Act and the Trump executive order on elections — on the fundamental right to vote and the continued need to protect and strengthen our democratic institutions for all communities. Both measures are part of a broader trend aimed at restricting voting access and disenfranchising vulnerable communities. These actions are deeply concerning, and we must take a firm stand to protect the integrity of our democracy and ensure that the right to vote remains accessible to all citizens, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or background.

The SAVE Act: Creating Unnecessary Barriers to Voting

The SAVE Act would require proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote in federal elections. Like other myths around voter fraud, it represents a solution in search of a problem that is rooted in dangerous myths

and stereotypes. There is no evidence whatsoever that people who are not citizens are participating in our elections on a widespread basis.¹

The SAVE Act would make it difficult for all Americans to register to vote. Approximately 21.3 million Americans do not possess or lack access to proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate or passport.² Moreover, citizenship documentation is required every time someone registers to vote.

The SAVE Act will disproportionately burden communities of color. Recent research shows that U.S. citizens of color were three times more likely than white citizens to lack documents such as U.S. birth certificates, passports, naturalization certificates, or certificates of citizenship — or otherwise face difficulties accessing them.³ For example, while approximately half of American adults possess a passport,⁴ two-thirds of Black Americans do not.⁵

Additionally, the SAVE Act would dismantle important tools that have made voting more accessible in recent years. Online voter registration and mail-in registration have significantly increased participation by making it easier for citizens to register and vote. For communities of color, these systems are essential, as many would face difficulties accessing in-person voter registration locations required under the SAVE Act. The bill's elimination of these systems would disproportionately affect communities who rely on these forms of registration, which have also proven to be especially helpful for younger voters, individuals with disabilities, and rural populations. The SAVE Act would further entrench existing barriers to voter participation, making it even more difficult for marginalized groups to fully participate in the democratic process.

Finally, the SAVE Act would produce voter purges resulting in mass disenfranchisement of our communities. Undoing an essential protection of the National Voter Registration Act, it does not require notification to registered voters before they are removed from the voting rolls. States could engage in targeting certain communities, resulting in overbroad purges of naturalized citizens like in Alabama, which last year purged more than 2,000 citizens who were lawfully registered to vote.⁶

¹ Waldman, Micheal. "Noncitizen Voting Is Already Illegal — and Vanishingly Rare." April 17, 2024. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/noncitizen-voting-already-illegal-and-vanishingly-rare>.

² Verhovek, Kendall. "21.3 Million American Citizens of Voting Age Don't Have Ready Access to Citizenship Documents." June 11, 2024. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/213-million-american-citizens-voting-age-dont-have-ready-access>.

³ Hammer, Michael J. & Novey, Samuel B. & Rothschild, Jillian A. "Who Lacks ID in America Today? AN Exploration of Voter ID Access, Barriers, and Knowledge." June 2024. <https://cdce.umd.edu/sites/cdce.umd.edu/files/pubs/Voter%20ID%20survey%20Key%20Results%20June%202024.pdf>.

⁴ Diller, Nathan. "Americans want to see the world, but only 51% took this important step to do it." Oct 23, 2024. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/news/2024/10/23/state-department-issues-record-us-passports/75794556007/>.

⁵ Bacsakai, Owen & Sweren-Becker, Eliza. "House Bill Would Hurt American Voters." Jan. 14, 2025. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/house-bill-would-hurt-american-voters>.

⁶ Riddle, Safiyah. "A federal judge halts an Alabama program that purged thousands of legal voters." Oct. 16, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/alabama-voter-purge-allen-secretary-state-judge-6cec74a5bc2afef14bae6827d4cf971>.

The Trump Administration's Executive Order on Elections: A Harmful Overreach

Similar to the SAVE Act, the Trump administration's executive order on elections attempts to impose proof-of-citizenship requirements on registration to vote. Again, there is simply no justification for doing so. The Trump order represents an end-run around Congress in seeking to suppress the vote on a national basis.

This executive order, like the SAVE Act, would place unnecessary burdens on tens of millions of eligible voters — communities of color, young people, seniors, rural voters, married women who have taken their spouse's name, and military voters.

The executive order is also a breathtaking overreach of executive power designed to suppress the vote of countless Americans. It is part of a broader strategy to suppress voter participation, particularly in communities of color, and to create an environment of uncertainty and fear surrounding the voting process. It seeks to create obstacles for vulnerable populations, making it more difficult for them to register and vote.

The executive order, much like the SAVE Act, undermines public trust in the electoral system. By imposing additional documentation requirements, it casts doubt on the integrity of the electoral process and creates confusion for voters. These unnecessary barriers are designed to deter eligible citizens from exercising their right to vote and to make it harder for communities of color to have their voices heard.

The Impact on Communities of Color

Both the SAVE Act and the Trump executive order are part of a larger pattern of policies that disproportionately affect communities of color. Throughout history, marginalized groups in the United States have faced numerous obstacles to voting, from literacy tests to poll taxes to voter intimidation. These new measures represent a modern attempt to federalize voter suppression, and they are designed to disproportionately impact communities who have historically struggled to gain full access to the political process.

African American and Native American communities, as well as other communities of color, face unique challenges in the voting process, including voter ID laws, purging of voter rolls, and lack of access to polling places. By creating more hurdles to voter registration, the SAVE Act and the executive order threaten to further disenfranchise these communities and perpetuate a cycle of underrepresentation in the political process.

Recommendations

Given the significant and harmful impact that the SAVE Act and the Trump executive order would have on communities of color, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights strongly urges Congress to reject the SAVE Act and oppose the Trump executive order. Additionally, we urge Congress to take the following actions to protect and expand voting rights for all Americans:

Congress should pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which is essential to restoring protections for voters, particularly in communities of color, who continue to face discriminatory barriers to the ballot box. This bill would reinstate and strengthen key provisions of the Voting Rights Act — as we celebrate the law’s 60th year — to ensure everyone can participate.

Congress must also pass the Freedom to Vote Act, a landmark bill that would expand access to the ballot for all Americans by strengthening protections for mail-in voting and early voting. It would create national standards to prevent voter suppression, eliminate partisan gerrymandering, and protect voters from discriminatory ID laws. This critical legislation would make Election Day a public holiday, ensuring that all eligible voters, regardless of their circumstances, can participate in our democracy.

Furthermore, Congress should pass the Native American Voting Rights Act, which would help ensure that Native Americans can access the polls and vote in a manner that is fair and free of obstacles. Native American communities face significant challenges in voting, including lack of access to polling locations, language barriers, and misidentification on voter rolls. The Native American Voting Rights Act is crucial to addressing these disparities and ensuring that Native Americans are fully included in the democratic process.

In addition, the issue of D.C. statehood must be addressed. The residents of the District of Columbia are tax-paying citizens and should have equal representation in Congress, just like all other U.S. citizens. Granting D.C. statehood would ensure that its residents have full access to the democratic process, including the right to vote on federal matters and elect representatives who have full voting power.

Conclusion: Defending Our Democracy

The SAVE Act and the Trump executive order on elections are direct threats to the voting rights of communities of color. These measures would create unnecessary barriers to voter registration and disproportionately affect marginalized populations, undermining the very foundation of our democracy. The Leadership Conference is committed to fighting against these regressive policies and advocating for reforms that expand access to the ballot.

We urge Congress to reject the SAVE Act and similar measures that seek to restrict voting rights. At the same time, we call for passage of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, the Freedom to Vote Act, the Native American Voting Rights Act, and the D.C. statehood bill. Together, we can protect the right to vote for all Americans, ensuring that our democracy remains inclusive, fair, and representative of the diverse voices of this nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. If you have any questions, please contact Leslie Proll, senior director for voting rights at The Leadership Conference, at proll@civilrights.org.