

RESOLUTION ON VOTING RIGHTS

Background:

The right to vote is fundamental to a vibrant democracy, and our elected office holders gain their moral authority to lead from a voting process that is fair and representative of the will of the people.

Historically, that has not been the case in the Commonwealth of Virginia, where voting rights were originally limited to white male landowners. Additionally, Virginia remains one of a handful states that permanently strip felons of the right to vote based on Jim Crow-era language explicitly inserted into Virginia's 1902 Constitution to prevent blacks from voting. However, under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Virginia has moved closer to fulfilling the promise of a representative democracy.

However, on June 25, 2013, the United States Supreme Court by a 5-4 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* held the Section 4(b) formula for determining which states should be subject to the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. Although legislation has been introduced since to update Section 4(b) to keep its formula current, the Republicans in Congress have blocked a legislative fix, leaving states free to take administrative action and enact laws that restrict voting rights and have a discriminatory impact.

Further restricting this fundamental right, Republicans in the Virginia General Assembly have imposed voter identification laws that make it harder for students and the elderly to vote and have defeated bills that would provide for no-excuse early in-person absentee voting.

In contrast, Gov. Terry McAuliffe has made a historic use of his executive powers to restore voting rights to all felons who have served their time, rather than rely upon a cumbersome case-by-case application process. By April 2017, Governor McAuliffe had used his Constitutional authority to individually restore voting rights to 156,221 Virginians who had completed their sentences and parole terms.

The prior policy had served to disproportionately bar minorities from regaining their voting rights.

Therefore, be it Resolved that, the 2017 Eighth District Democratic Convention:

1. Condemns any measure that seeks to gain political advantage from hindering citizens from exercising their fundamental right to vote,

2. Urges Congress to act promptly to fix Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act so that states with a recent history of discrimination will once again be subject to pre-clearance review by the U.S. Department of Justice,
3. Urges the Virginia General Assembly to enact a no-excuse in-person early (absentee) voting procedures, repeal the recently-enacted voter ID laws, and streamline voter registration procedures; and
4. Commends our Governor for his recent blanket actions to restore voting rights to convicted felons who have served their time without the unnecessary and time consuming application process that had been previously imposed.
5. Demands that the Virginia General Assembly amend Article II, Section I of the State Constitution to remove Jim Crow-era felon disenfranchisement provisions.
6. Calls for the Virginia Parole Board and other government organizations to actively educate Virginians on their restored voting rights and assist them in registering to vote.