

VOTING RIGHTS ARE FUNDAMENTAL

Katie Maddocks, Legislative and Political Director



This summer was the anniversary of the Voting Rights Act that expanded access to the polls for black voters who were previously disenfranchised. The strength of a democracy is based on voter participation, ensuring all eligible citizens have access to voter registration and face no barriers. This ensures that voters are choosing elected officials that accurately represent their interests at all levels of government. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 addressed post-Reconstruction Era state laws that prohibited many citizens from voting. The law banned literacy tests required to register to vote. It also required states and jurisdictions with a history of discriminatory practices to obtain approval from the federal government before making changes to local election laws or voting maps. Because of the law, between 1964 and 1968, Black voter participation in presidential elections increased by 67 percent. Increases in Black voter participation then led to an increase in Black elected officials. What followed was an increase in state funding sent to historically underserved communities, including increased spending on education, first responder services, and general infrastructure projects. Most communities that were previously subject to literacy tests saw an increase of local spending by almost double over twenty years from when the VRA was enacted.

In order to strengthen the VRA, amendments have been made to strengthen provisions. Expansions made five and ten years after this initial law addressed issues of gerrymandering and voting discrimination facing other minority groups. However, in 2013, a Supreme Court decision overturned the VRA provision requiring the states to seek approval for changing local voting laws. The result of that decision was predictable. We have seen repeated efforts to make voting more difficult, including limits to online voter registration and same-day registration; restricted access to early voting; stricter voter identification laws; closures of polling locations; and efforts to purge voter rolls. To restore access to the voting process, members of Congress introduced the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Full access to the voting process is the only way to maintain a healthy representative, democracy.

Unfortunately, there is also legislation that would make further limitations to voting. Over the past year, fueled by a

false narrative of voter fraud, legislation has been introduced requiring documentary proof of citizenship to change their voter registration, despite the fact that current laws already require verification of voter eligibility. This means that people moving or otherwise changing their voter registration would have to present physical documents like a passport, birth certificate, adoption certificate, or naturalization papers. Additionally, any changes to voter registration have to be made in person, limiting online and mail-in registration. As a reminder, the Constitution gives power to states' legislatures to determine how elections are conducted – this would circumvent states' rights by federalizing elections. Allegations of voter fraud instill doubt in the safety of elections and undermine voter confidence. Continual talk of illegitimate election results can turn voters away from polls, weakening the democratic process.

Further adding to confusion over the voting process, in March President Trump issued an Executive Order that called for a proposed rule change to the US Code requiring states' election boards to submit to the United States Postal Service a list of voters who are eligible for mail-in or absentee ballots. Postal employees would then be required to pull any ballots that are not on the state submitted lists. Mail Handlers are in the business of processing the mail, not taking it out of the system. During the 2024 federal elections, over 99 million ballots were processed by the Postal Service. 99.8 percent of ballots were delivered to election officials within a week, and 97.73 percent were delivered within three days. The proposed rule ignores the already secure method of vote by mail and undermines the democratic process. There have been temporary injunctions on the proposed rule, however there is lasting confusion from voters on the 2026 elections.

As such, the NPMHU encourages its members to check their voter registrations with their states. Members and their families can go to [vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) to check their status, as well as find information on polling locations and how to vote by mail. For those who are eligible to vote by mail, we encourage you to fill out your ballot and return it as soon as possible. And most importantly, we encourage our members to vote for candidates who wholeheartedly support the NPMHU, the Postal Service, and the labor movement.