



The Voting Rights Amendment Act, S. 1945: Updating the Voting Rights Act in Response to Shelby County v. Holder
Submitted comments for the hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, June 25, 2014, 10:00 a.m.

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) would like to thank the Senate Judiciary Committee for holding this important hearing on S. 1945, the Voting Rights Act Amendment. NDRN and the network of Protection and Advocacy (P&A) nationwide systems have been involved in advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities to vote for many years. Although the United States has made significant progress toward ensuring that its electoral system is accessible to everyone, there is still much work to be done.

Who Are NDRN and the Protection and Advocacy Systems?

NDRN is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) systems for individuals with disabilities. The P&As were established by the United States Congress to protect the rights of people with disabilities and their families through legal support, advocacy, referral, and education. P&As are in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands), and there is a P&A affiliated with the Native American Consortium which includes the Hopi, Navaho and Piute Nations in the Four Corners region of the Southwest. Collectively, the P&A Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States.

NDRN thanks Senator Leahy and Representatives Sensenbrenner, Conyers, Chabot, Scott, Lewis, among others, for their demonstrated leadership on this critical issue. This bipartisan legislation includes a new coverage formula in response to the Supreme Court's *Shelby v. Holder* decision, which struck down the previous formula and rendered Section 5 pre-clearance under the Voting Rights Act essentially null. In addition, the new bill will require jurisdictions in every state to provide notification of redistricting, movement of polling places, or changes to existing voting laws prior to a federal election.

The Voting Rights Act is one of the most important pieces of voting rights legislation in our nation's history, and Congress needs to act to restore it. The Protection and Advocacy agencies in every state and territory through the Protection and Advocacy for Voter Access (PAVA) program see that the movement of polling places and changes to state and local election laws impact voters with disabilities as much as any other American. The Voting Rights Amendment Act is an important first step, and we hope it will start a larger national discourse on elections administration and next steps toward ensuring access to the vote for all, including people with disabilities.

We believe the time is now to pass legislation to ensure that the Voting Rights Act can be fully enforced. Every day we wait is another day voters are at risk of being kept from the polls.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments regarding this important legislation. If you would like further information, please contact L. Dara Baldwin, MPA – Public Policy Analyst at (202) 408-9514, ext. 102 or at dara.baldwin@ndrn.org.