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The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley:

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 900 congregations encompass more than 1.3 million Reform Jews across North America and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, we strongly support the passage of the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (S. 1945).

Jewish tradition teaches us that the selection of leaders is not a privilege but a collective responsibility. The Sage Hillel taught, "Do not separate yourself from the community" (Pirkei Avot 2:4). Rabbi Yitzchak taught that "a ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" (Babylonian Talmud, B'rachot 55a). In keeping with the insight of these teachings, we have long felt that it is the duty of all who cherish democracy to ensure that all eligible citizens are afforded the opportunity to vote and have their votes counted. The right to vote is fundamental to American democracy, and the Reform Jewish Movement has for the past century strongly supported legislation that protects the rights of all citizens to be free of discrimination in their efforts to exercise the right to vote.

The Supreme Court's decision one year ago in *Shelby v. Holder* invalidated key parts of the Voting Rights Act. Unfortunately, while it is true that voter discrimination is less rampant than it was when the Voting Rights Act was first passed in 1965, to suggest, as this decision does, that it no longer exists is simply inaccurate. The legal protections that remain are inadequate to uphold the voting rights of all Americans, and in the aftermath of the Court's *Shelby* decision, many states previously covered by the invalidated "preclearance" formula have tested the extent to which they can legally limit citizens' access to the ballot box, by introducing, and in some cases passing, restrictive voting laws. The Voting Rights Amendment Act (S. 1945) is a bicameral, bipartisan bill that would play a key role in upholding those rights. The bill reflects contemporary realities, is flexible and forward-looking, and directly addresses the concerns of the Court in *Shelby*.

The Union for Reform Judaism and Central Conference of American Rabbis strongly urge Congress to pass swiftly the Voting Rights Amendment Act. It is vital to ensure that the protections that voters have enjoyed for decades remain protected in advance of the elections this November.

Sincerely,

Rabbi David Saperstein



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.

