

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties
Hearing on
“History and Enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965”
March 12, 2019 – 10:00 am – 2141 Rayburn

- I thank the Chairman of this subcommittee, Congressman Steve Cohen, for convening this hearing and for his leadership and important work facilitating this very critical opportunity to look at the machinations to what gives strength to many of the views we express in our daily acts of patriotism – “one person, one vote” – “government of, by, and for the people.”
- Currently, only 68 percent of eligible voters are registered in Texas and state restrictions on third party registration, such as the Volunteer Deputy Registrar program, exacerbate the systemic disenfranchisement of minority communities.
- These type of programs are often aimed at minority and underserved communities that, for many, many other reasons (like demonization by the president, for example) or mistrust of law enforcement are afraid to live as openly as otherwise required.
- With the elimination of preclearance, we are on our way to being back to square one for rehabilitating the Voting Rights Act.
- So the lesson we learn here is that maintaining our rights requires vigilance.
- But taking a look at that requires regular maintenance and service.

- More than half a century after the passage of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, we are still discussing voter suppression – something which should be a relic of the past, yet continues to undercut racial minorities, immigrants, women, and young people.
- The *Voting Rights Act of 1965* was a watershed moment for the Civil Rights Movement – it liberated communities of color from legal restrictions barring them from their essential right to civic engagement and political representation.
- But uncaged by Supreme Court’s infamous 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling which struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, 14 states, including my state of Texas, took extreme measures to enforce new voting restrictions before the 2016 presidential election.
- For example, in Harris County, we had a system where voters were getting purged from the rolls, effectively requiring people to keep active their registrations.
- Following the U.S. Supreme Court’s Decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013, hundreds of polling locations closed in Texas—significantly more in number and percentage than any other state.
- In addition, the Texas Election Code only requires a 72-hour notice of polling location changes.
- These are just a few examples of the erosion of equal access to voting.
- It is imperative that our electorate actually reflects the priorities and diversity of our communities.

- That is why I am proud that we held a hearing on HR 1, the For The People Act, legislation from Congressman Sarbanes of which I am proud to be an original cosponsor – we examined all the onerous ways our democracy has been burdened by the lack of preclearance.
- We heard from the head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, we heard from The Leadership Conference in Civil and Human Rights.
- We are actively exploring all the ways in which we can strengthen our democracy.
- I strongly support H.R. 1 because of its numerous and salutary reforms in the area of voting rights and protection, specifically the provisions that:
 1. Prohibit “voter caging”;
 2. Restore the voting franchise in federal elections to the formerly incarcerated persons;
 3. Prohibits deceptive practices and voter intimidation;
 4. Reaffirms Congress’s commitment to restore the Voting Rights Act; and
 5. Include measure to combat congressional gerrymandering.
- Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have cosponsored dozens of bills, amendments, and resolutions seeking to improve voters’ rights at all stages and levels of the election process.
- This includes legislation aimed at:

- Increasing voter outreach and turnout;
 - Ensuring both early and same-day registration;
 - Standardizing physical and language accessibility at polling places;
 - Expanding early voting periods;
 - Decreasing voter wait times;
 - Guaranteeing absentee ballots, especially for displaced citizens;
 - Modernizing voting technologies and strengthening our voter record systems;
 - Establishing the federal Election Day as a national holiday; and
 - Condemning and criminalizing deceptive practices, voter intimidation, and other suppression tactics;
- Along with many of my colleagues in the CBC, I was an original cosponsor of H.R. 9, the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act, which became public law on July 27, 2006.
 - I also authored H.R. 745 in the 110th Congress, which added the legendary Barbara Jordan to the list of civil rights trailblazers

whose names honor the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act.

- This bill strengthened the original Voting Rights Act by replacing federal voting examiners with federal voting observers – a significant distinction that made it easier to safeguard against racially biased voter suppression tactics.
- In the 114th Congress, I introduced H.R. 75, the Coretta Scott King Mid-Decade Redistricting Prohibition Act of 2015, which would prohibit states whose congressional districts have been redistricted after a decennial census from redrawing their district lines until the next census.
- Prejudiced redistricting, or gerrymandering as it is more commonly known, has been used for decades to weaken the voting power of African Americans, Latino Americans, and other minorities since the Civil Rights Era.
- After the Shelby County Supreme Court ruling, which lifted all preclearances for states with histories of discrimination seeking to change their voting laws or practices, redistricting became a favorite tool for Republicans who connived to unfairly win 2 or 3 more seats for their party in the House of Representatives.
- In the 110th Congress, I was the original sponsor of H.R. 6778, the Ex-Offenders Voting Rights Act of 2008, which declared that the right of a U.S. citizen to vote in a federal election could not be denied because an individual had been previously convicted of a criminal offense.
- The Ex-Offenders Voting Rights Act sought to reverse discriminatory voter restrictions that disproportionately affect the African American voting population, which continues to be targeted

by mass incarceration, police profiling, and a wholly biased criminal justice system.

- In light of my dedicated commitment to the issue, I look forward to discussing the history of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with the witnesses and my colleagues here today.
- Thank you.

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