



PRESS RELEASE
September 12, 2018

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**U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases [Report](#):
*An Assessment of Minority Voting Rights Access in the United States***

Washington, DC – Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released its [report](#), *An Assessment of Minority Voting Rights Access in the United States*. Based on extensive research and expert and public testimony, the report assesses minority voter access around the country, and evaluates the Department of Justice’s enforcement of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) since 2006, in particular after the Supreme Court’s *Shelby County v. Holder* [decision](#). In *Shelby County*, the Supreme Court held that preclearance provisions of the VRA unconstitutionally determined which jurisdictions needed federal government pre-approval to change voting procedures.

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon said, “Today’s report reflects the reality that citizens in the United States – across many states, not limited only to some parts of the country – continue to suffer significant, and profoundly unequal, limitations on their ability to vote. That stark reality denigrates our democracy and diminishes our ideals. This level of ongoing discrimination confirms what was true before 1965, when the Voting Rights Act became law, and has remained true since 1965: Americans need strong and effective federal protections to guarantee that ours is a real democracy.”

Key unanimous findings and recommendations from the Commission include:

- In states across the country – and particularly in many previously covered under the preclearance requirements of the VRA – **new laws and voting procedures are impacting minority voting rights**. Examples of such laws and procedures include:
 - Strict voter ID laws;
 - Closing polling places;
 - Cutting early voting;
 - Voting roll purges and challenges to eligibility.
- Since *Shelby County* halted the federal preclearance regime, **elections have taken place under laws that were later found in court to be intentionally discriminatory against communities of color**.
- In the face of ongoing discrimination in voting procedures enacted by states across the country, enforcement and litigation under Section 2 of the VRA is an inadequate, costly and often slow method for protecting voting rights.

- Because of the nature of voting rules being broadly applicable to all eligible voters, a single change in law, procedure, or practice can disproportionately affect large numbers of eligible voters and possibly discriminate against certain groups of people whose voting rights are protected by the VRA.

The Commission, unanimously, calls on Congress to:

- **Amend the VRA to restore and expand protections against discrimination, including federal preclearance.**
- When establishing the reach of an amended VRA preclearance coverage provision, **include current evidence of, and historical and persisting patterns of, discrimination.**
- Consider the reality that **infringement of voting rights may arise in jurisdictions that do not have extensive histories** of discrimination, as minority populations shift.
- Provide a streamlined **remedy to review changes with known risks of discrimination, before they take effect** — not after potentially tainted elections.

The Commission, unanimously, calls on the Department of Justice to:

- **Pursue more VRA enforcement to address the aggressive efforts by state and local officials to limit the vote** of citizens of color, citizens with disabilities, and those with limited-English proficiency.

In North Carolina, we held a public [briefing](#) on voting rights, receiving testimony from 23 current and government officials, legal experts, academics, civil society actors, and some 40 members of the public. Twelve Commission state Advisory [Committees](#) – [Alabama](#), [Alaska](#), [Arizona](#), [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Kansas](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maine](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Ohio](#), and [Texas](#) - have carried out their own voting rights investigations, contributing to this Commission report.

The Commission was established in 1957 with the initial charge of addressing voting rights. Commission reporting on pervasive voting discrimination in the 1950s and 60s contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).