

April 13, 2015

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to pass House Bill 1745/Senate Bill 5668, the Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA). We support the WVRA because we believe that in a democracy, everyone's vote should count equally. Yet in some jurisdictions, significant communities, including many communities of color, are not represented in local government. The WVRA empowers local governments to take the lead in fixing this problem, with solutions tailored to fit local circumstances.

The WVRA Promotes Local Control

The WVRA recognizes that every local community is different. It does not mandate any particular voting system. Instead, it provides a collaborative process and a roadmap for local governments to tailor their own solutions to meet local needs. It keeps control in the hands of local officials, rather than federal judges. And it allows local governments to hold elections according to existing timetables, avoiding additional cost.

The WVRA Makes Government Accountable

The WVRA makes local government more accountable to the people it serves. Currently, some communities do not have a voice in local government. The WVRA provides tools not currently available in the law to provide solutions. The WVRA does not mandate proportional representation or district-based elections, but instead, will give local communities an equal opportunity to elect officials who represent their needs and interests, helping to make elected bodies truly representative. This will help give all community members, including those in communities of color that face historical and current barriers to participation, a level playing field that gives them an equal opportunity to influence the outcome of elections.

A State Voting Rights Act Helps Avoid Costly Federal Litigation

The federal Voting Rights Act focuses on litigation in federal court, which can be highly complex and very costly. The city of Yakima recently was successfully sued under the federal law, and its costs for the suit will run into the millions of dollars. Washington needs its own, more flexible voting rights law. The WVRA not only protects our state's communities, it also provides cities a pathway to avoid expensive federal litigation. The provisions of the WVRA allow ample time to act before going to court. And the bill includes strong protections against frivolous lawsuits, as well as safe harbor for jurisdictions that make changes.

In sum, the WVRA will improve election processes, empower local governments, and promote government accountability, ensuring that our democracy works for everybody. Community members across Washington urge your support for its passage.

Sincerely,

21 Progress

American Civil Liberties Union of Washington
American Federation of Teachers Washington
American Muslims of Puget Sound

APIAs for Civic Empowerment Votes
Casa Latina
Center for Justice
Economic Opportunity Institute
Entre Hermanos
Faith Action Network
Fuse Washington
Islamic Civic Engagement Project
La Casa Hogar
Latino Civic Alliance
Latino PAC of Washington
League of Women Voters of Washington
Legal Voice
Muslim Health Professionals of Greater Puget Sound
National Organization for Women
Northwest Fair Housing Alliance
OneAmerica
Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane
Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest
Progreso: Latino Progress Alliance
Real Change
Seattle National Organization for Women
SEIU 775
SEIU Healthcare 1199NW
Sound Advocates for Retirement Action
Southwest WA League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Council
Teamsters Local 117
The Washington Bus
UAW Local 4121
Unitarian Universalist Voices for Justice
Washington State National Organization for Women
Washington Teamsters Joint Council 28
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Conservation Voters
Washington Education Association
Washington Environmental Council
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance
Washington State Association for Justice
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Win/Win Network