Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 9, 2011

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman, House Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member, House Committee on the Judiciary
B-351 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Daniel E. Lungren
Chairman, Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert A. Brady
Ranking Member, Committee on House Administration
1307 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Conyers, Chairman Lungren and Ranking Member Brady:

We write to express our concern regarding recent actions taken by state legislatures across the nation to significantly change their states' election laws. These widespread changes have the potential to affect the upcoming 2012 elections, as well as the Constitutional rights of millions of Americans. We, therefore, request that your Committees hold hearings to assess the impact that these changes will have on states and voter rights.

As you know, the right to vote is guaranteed by the Constitution and a cornerstone of our democracy. We should be making it easier for Americans to vote, not harder. Over 30 states have enacted or attempted to enact laws that will create barriers to voting, among them: Florida's HB 1355, signed into law by Gov. Rick Scott, limiting access to the polls for minorities, seniors, and college students, as well as limiting early voting days and imposing new restrictive regulations on voter registration groups; Alabama requiring proof of citizenship and government-issued photo identification in order to vote and Texas imposing similar voter ID requirements; Maine eliminating same-day registration; and Wisconsin requiring voters to show a government photo identification card at a polling place before they can vote.

The Voting Rights Act is the primary tool used to protect voters from these kinds of political exploitations. Designed to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution, the Act covers a vast range of activities that affect voters. According to the Supreme Court, determining whether a voting-related change is in violation of the Voting Rights Act is contingent upon whether the change "would lead to a retrogression in the position of racial minorities with respect to their effective exercise of the electoral franchise." Simply put, the aforementioned laws that have been enacted by states all across our nation seriously undermine the rights of voters.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Congress has the Constitutional authority to act to protect the rights of all voters. In the face of voter suppression laws being enacted across the nation, Congress must determine the extent of the problem and provide appropriate remedies. Despite years of progress, inequities and obstacles still remain. We must work together to strengthen our nation's democracy and ensure that the voting rights of all Americans are protected. Again, we respectfully request that the Committees hold a hearing to address this extremely important matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We respectfully ask that you keep us informed of our request. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Sincerely,

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Corrine Brown
Member of Congress

Laura Richardson
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress

Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress

Jared Polis
Member of Congress

G.K. Butterfield
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

Rush Holt
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Andre Carson
Member of Congress

Donna M. Christensen
Member of Congress

Rubén Hinojosa
Member of Congress

Pete Stark
Member of Congress

Carolyn Maloney
Member of Congress

Sam Farr
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Michael Honda
Member of Congress

Charles Gonzalez
Member of Congress

Hank Johnson
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress

Donna F. Edwards
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress