



October 15, 2021

Senator Joseph Manchin III
900 Pennsylvania Ave., Suite 629
Charleston, WV 25302

Dear Senator Manchin:

On behalf of the League of Women Voters, thank you for your work to create a bipartisan solution to address the disfunction of our voting rights systems. We write to request a meeting with you to discuss the critical importance of continued efforts to increase access to the right to vote for all Americans, regardless of where they live or who they are. As you know, there is growing urgency to pass the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. These bills are essential to counter the unprecedented wave of anti-voter laws advancing in the states and to protect Americans from unnecessary barriers to the ballot.

As a reminder, the League of Women Voters of West Virginia is a nonpartisan volunteer organization working to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League of Women Voters of WV neither supports nor opposes candidates but is engaged in local, state, and national issues of importance to our community. We thank you for all the work that you have done thus far on Voting rights issues for the people of West Virginia.

As the U.S. Supreme Court noted more than a century ago, the right to vote is “preservative of all rights.”¹ Nothing is more fundamental to the fabric of civic life than the freedom to vote and the inherent authority of the American people. But now, our nation is at a crossroads. The freedom to vote is under threat with a force not seen for decades.² Time is of the essence to seize every opportunity to ensure every voice and vote count.

In your op-ed, published on June 6, you wrote, “The right to vote is fundamental to our American democracy and protecting that right should not be about party or politics. Least of all, protecting this right, which is a value I share, should never be done in a partisan manner.”³ Right now, it is more important than ever to protect voting rights as lawmakers across the country – including in West Virginia – advance legislation to create barriers to the ballot box. All of them concern us. All of them make it harder for Black, Brown, Asian American, and Native people to vote. And all of them need to change.

¹ *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356 (1886).

² “Voting Laws Roundup: May 2021.” *Brennan Center for Justice*. May 28, 2021.
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-may-2021>

³ Manchin, Joe. “Why I’m voting against the For the People Act” *Charleston Gazette-Mail*. June 6, 2021.
https://www.wvgazette.com/opinion/op_ed_commentaries/joe-manchin-why-im-voting-against-the-for-the-people-act/article_c7eb2551-a500-5f77-aa37-2e42d0af870f.html.

During the 2020 election, the lack of options for early voting in West Virginia, such as drop boxes, or same-day voter registration kept many people away from the polls. Despite lifting requirements for requesting an absentee ballot, West Virginians were required to apply online to receive their absentee ballots, notwithstanding that West Virginia is among the states with the lowest levels of internet access in the country.⁴ Earlier this year, the West Virginia Legislature introduced Senate Bill 565, which would create barriers for West Virginians to participate in elections. The bill would push up the deadline for early in-person voting and for submitting vote-by-mail applications and replace automatic voter registration for people obtaining or transferring driver's licenses with an opt-in option.⁵

In short, the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act each fill a distinct and critical role in protecting the freedom to vote and ensuring elections are safe and accessible. When it comes to our elections, we all want a transparent process we can trust, where Americans have equal freedom to vote, whether we live in a small town or big city, or the coasts or the Midwest. Only passage of both the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act can make the promise of a democracy that works for — and includes — us all a reality.

The national discussion about the right to vote freely and without discrimination must be elevated above the bitter partisanship that has come to define so much of our modern politics. When we allow this rancor to fester — and worse, when we allow it to define our healthy debate of critical issues — all people in America lose. As you consider the legacy you will leave for generations of West Virginians, and in the spirit of bipartisanship that expanded the franchise after centuries of violent prejudice and exclusion, we urge you to join with your colleagues in passing these bills that are broadly popular across the country and so critical to the future of our nation.⁶

Thank you for considering our request for a meeting to discuss the state of voting rights and a path forward for the nation. The eyes of history are upon us. Your leadership in this moment carries great weight, and we look forward to working together to fulfill the promise of our democracy for all.

Sincerely,

Julie Archer
Co-President

Euphemia Kallas
Co-President

⁴ Hopkins, Jamie Smith, "In West Virginia, One Barrier to Voting Removed, Other Stumbling Blocks Still in Place." *The Center for Public Integrity*. October 12, 2020. <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/us-polling-places/in-west-virginia-one-barrier-to-voting-removed-other-stumbling-blocks-still-in-place/>.

⁵ Kabler, Phil, "WV Senate passes bill to rein in voting options." *Charleston Gazette-Mail*. March 24, 2021. https://www.wvgazette.com/news/legislative_session/wv-senate-passes-bill-to-rein-in-voting-options/article_b87e33f2-9e6d-5c40-9966-95d62852021a.html.

⁶ Lake, C., Mermin, D., Juetten, J., & Sanchez, J. "Recent research shows strong public support for the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act." *Lake Research Partners*. April 22, 2021. <https://votingrightslab.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Lake-Research-Partners-Federal-Polling-Memo-April-2021.pdf>.