Dear Senator:

On behalf of TBD, we write to urge your support for the Voting Rights Advancement Act, S. 1659 (The Advancement Act).

The Advancement Act responds to the unique, modern-day challenges of voting discrimination that has evolved in the 50 years since the Voting Rights Act first passed. The Voting Rights Advancement Act recognizes that changing demographics require tools that protect voters nationwide—especially voters of color, voters who rely on languages other than English, and voters with disabilities. It also requires that jurisdictions make voting changes public and transparent.

**The Voting Rights Advancement Act would address the Supreme Court’s 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* with the following initiatives:**

**Modernize the preclearance formula to cover states with a pattern of discrimination that puts voters at risk.**

Modern-day voting discrimination is not only a problem in the South. Based on a review of recent voting rights violations, states like California and New York as well as Texas, Alabama, and North Carolina would be required to have all of their voting changes precleared. Other states that would be covered if the bill is passed this year would be Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia. Preclearance would be lifted after 10 years for states and local jurisdictions without violations.

**Ensure that last-minute voting changes won’t adversely affect voters.**

Communities have a right to know about voting changes that affect them. To ensure that voters are informed about last-minute voting changes that may adversely impact them, the Advancement Act requires that jurisdictions publicly notice all changes to voting laws that happen within 180 days before an election.

**Protect voters from the types of voting changes most likely to discriminate against people of color and language minorities.**

The Advancement Act would require jurisdictions across the country to preclear changes that make it harder for voters of color or language minority voters to make their voices heard. These types of changes include:

* Additions to or subtractions of seats that could affect the influence of minority voters. Localities seeking to dilute the strength of minority voters have added at-large seats to city councils, instead of allowing minorities more voting strength in particular neighborhoods. For instance, after *Shelby County v. Holder,* Pasadena, Texas, passed a referendum that changed the city council from eight localized district seats to six district seats and two seats elected at-large. The change reduced Latino voting strength.
* Reducing the availability of voting materials in languages other than English.
* Adding new barriers to voter registration or verification.
* Reducing, consolidating or relocating polling places.

**Enhance the Ability to Apply Preclearance Review when Needed**

The Advancement Act permits a federal court to use its discretion to order a preclearance remedy if it finds any violation of the Voting Rights Act, including a violation based on a finding of discriminatory intent or result, including those resulting from a state photo ID law.

**Expands the Effective Federal Observer Program**

The Advancement Act permits the attorney general to send federal observers to any place she determines there is a substantial risk of racial discrimination at the polls on Election Day or during the early voting period. The bill also makes clear the tribal governments have the ability to request federal election observers and monitors.

**Improves Voting Rights Protections for Native Americans and Alaska Natives**

The Advancement Act would require jurisdictions to offer greater access for voter registration and voting on and off Indian reservations. The bill also ensures that ballots are translated into all written Native languages in jurisdictions with are required to provide registration, voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance or other materials – including ballots – in the language of the applicable minority group.

We believe that the Advancement Act responds to the Court’s directive in *Shelby County v. Holder* and provides key protections against voting discrimination to compensate for the loss of Section 4 of the VRA, the provision that sets out the formula under which states are covered by the preclearance requirement.

The bill responds to the unique, modern-day challenges of voting discrimination that have evolved in the 50 years since the Voting Rights Act was first passed. The Advancement Act recognizes that changing demographics require tools that protect voters nationwide. It also requires that jurisdictions make voting changes public and transparent.

The VRA is the most successful civil rights statute ever enacted by Congress. For the last 50 years, the work to protect citizens from racial discrimination in voting has been bipartisan work. The statute was passed with leadership from both the Republican and Democratic parties, and the reauthorizations of the enforcement provisions were signed into law each time by Republican presidents – Nixon in 1970; Ford in 1975; Reagan in 1982; and George W. Bush in 2006.

The Act made it possible for racial minority voters across the country to participate equally in the electoral process. Because of the VRA, literacy tests, poll taxes, and other discriminatory mechanisms were invalidated. In recent years, the Act has worked to block voting practices, such as redistricting plans, registration requirements, polling place changes, and voter ID laws that were found to be racially discriminatory.

Yet since the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby County*, voting discrimination has become harder to stop. In states, counties, and cities across the country, legislators have pushed through laws designed to make it harder for minorities to vote. In the lead-up to the 2014 election, a resurgence of laws to increase barriers to voting, and dilute minority voting strength, have put the right to vote in more danger than at any time in the past 50 years. And this year, in 2016, voters will face the first presidential election in 50 years where they will lack strong protections in federal law to combat racial discrimination in voting. Congress can no longer continue to ignore the problem of modern voting discrimination. Congress must act to restore the VRA.

Today, Congress must fulfill its obligations under the Constitution to eradicate voting discrimination by restoring the strength and effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act. Fifty years after brave Americans gave their lives for the right to vote, we cannot allow their legacy and the protections they fought for to continue to unravel. We urge you to support this important bill.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact TBD.

Sincerely,