

Harris County



Precinct One

RODNEY ELLIS
Commissioner

AGENDA ITEM

June 08, 2021

County Judge Lina Hidalgo
Members of Commissioners Court

RE: Resolution in support of efforts to protect and advance voting rights.

Dear Judge Hidalgo and Commissioners Cagle, Garcia, and Ramsey:

Precinct One respectfully requests approval of a resolution in support of efforts to protect and advance voting rights.

Sincerely,


Commissioner Rodney Ellis

RE: SE

xc: BD



Resolution

WHEREAS, Voting is the most sacred right in our democracy. Since our country's founding, people have been fighting to expand access to the ballot box, so that women and people of color could fully participate in our democratic process and make their voices heard. Our democracy can only work if everyone participates.

WHEREAS, For hundreds of years, voting rights were denied to citizens based on unavoidable characteristics such as the ability to own property and a person's gender, race, or age. Even after voting rights were expanded through Constitutional amendments, state and local officials used voter suppression tactics like literacy tests, poll taxes, and false claims that voters were not registered to prevent Black Americans and others from voting; and

WHEREAS, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) aimed to address laws at the state and local levels that prevented Black Americans from exercising their right to vote. Once signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the VRA banned the use of literacy tests, provided for federal oversight of voter registration, and authorized the U.S. Attorney General to investigate the use of poll taxes in state and local elections; and

WHEREAS, After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, voter turnout among Black people increased from 6 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1969. The Act was amended in 1975 to add protections from voting discrimination for language minority citizens. Millions of Texans benefited from these expanded protections which increased voting access for Black and Brown citizens; and

WHEREAS, The United States Congress renewed the special provisions of the Voting Rights Act in 2006 as part of the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Cesar E. Chavez, Barbara Jordan, William Velasquez and Dr. Hector Garcia Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires pre-clearance of voting provisions, was unconstitutional, setting the stage for new voter suppression legislation and tactics; and

WHEREAS, Even with the Voting Rights Act protections, the Texas legislature has a long history of promoting policies that limit access to free and fair elections, and some of the State's actions have been found unconstitutional. By purging voter rolls, forcing polling places to close, creating burdensome voter identification laws, maintaining a difficult voter registration law and using minor violations of election law to imprison Texans, the State has ensured that voters face many barriers when exercising their fundamental right to vote. In 2020, state leaders made significant efforts to force voters to cast ballots in person, unlike the majority of States that expanded vote-by-mail to provide safe access to voting during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, In the 87th Texas Legislative session, the Governor and legislators supporting Senate Bill 7 (SB 7) which promoted policies that would restrict access to voting, suppress votes and lead to more voter intimidation. Specifically, SB 7 was rewritten without notice to include limitations on Sunday early voting hours, increased vote-by-mail restrictions, more restrictions on local

election officials to stop options like drive-thru voting, and increased access for partisan poll watchers. These restrictions could directly suppress votes in Black and Brown communities; and

WHEREAS, SB 7 is part of the national effort to enact more restrictive voting legislation nationwide as a direct assault on democracy. Fourteen states enacted twenty-two laws to restrict access to voting through May 2021 which makes these voter suppression efforts the most significant since 2011. After increased voter participation in Georgia, the State enacted a law that reduces the number of ballot boxes, restricts the early voting window, adds photo ID requirements, and gives state officials the authority to circumvent county election officials. National Civil Rights organizations have worked tirelessly to combat this new version of Jim Crow in the face of over 380 restrictive bills proposed in 48 states; however, these laws will be difficult to stop without Federal protections; and

WHEREAS, The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act proposed in 2020 restores the full protections of the original, bipartisan Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Act establishes a process for reviewing voting changes in jurisdictions nationwide and focuses on measures that have historically been used to discriminate against voters. And the U.S. House passed the For the People Act in March 2021 to expand access to the ballot box by creating automatic voter registration across the country, restore the voting rights of the formerly incarcerated, expand early voting and modernize voting systems; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that voter suppression laws and policies are a potential threat to democracy. The Harris County Commissioners Court affirms its commitment to protecting the right to vote for all citizens through our actions and deeds and offers continued support to stand against voter suppression in all its forms. The Court respectfully asks our federal and state partners to enact laws that will guarantee free, fair, and safe elections for all.

LINA HIDALGO, County Judge

RODNEY ELLIS, Commissioner
Precinct One

ADRIAN GARCIA, Commissioner
Precinct Two

TOM S. RAMSEY, P.E., Commissioner
Precinct Three

R. JACK CAGLE, Commissioner
Precinct Four

ATTEST:

Teneshia Hudspeth, County Clerk
Harris County, T E X A S