

2015-J2894

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, By 1965, concerted efforts to break the grip of state disenfranchisement had been under way in the United States for some time, but had achieved only modest success overall and in some areas had proved almost entirely ineffectual; numerous acts of violence, terrorism and the murder of voting-rights activists in Philadelphia and Mississippi gained national attention; and

WHEREAS, Finally, the unprovoked attack on March 7, 1965, by state troopers on peaceful marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, en route to the state capitol in Montgomery, persuaded President Lyndon B. Johnson and the United States Congress to overcome Southern legislators' resistance to effective voting rights legislation; the President issued a call for a strong voting rights law and hearings began soon thereafter on the bill that would become the Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the resulting legislation into law; this landmark piece of federal legislation in the United States prohibits racial discrimination in voting;

Congress later amended the Act five times to expand its protections; and

WHEREAS, Designed to enforce the voting rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, the Act allowed for a mass enfranchisement of racial minorities throughout the country, especially in the South; according to the United States Department of Justice, the Act is considered to be the most effective piece of civil rights legislation ever enacted in the country; and

WHEREAS, The Act contains numerous provisions that regulate the administration of elections, the Act's general provisions provide nationwide protections for voting rights; Section 2, for instance, prohibits any state or local government from imposing any voting law that results in discrimination against racial or language minorities; additionally, the Act specifically outlaws literacy tests and similar devices that were historically used to disenfranchise racial minorities; and

WHEREAS, The Act also contains special provisions that apply to only certain jurisdictions; a core special provision is the Section 5 preclearance requirement, which prohibits certain jurisdictions from implementing any change affecting voting without receiving preapproval from the United States Attorney General or the United States District Court for the District of Columbia that the change does not discriminate against protected minorities; and

WHEREAS, Another special provision requires jurisdictions containing significant language-minority populations to provide bilingual ballots and other election materials; Section 5 and most other special provisions apply to jurisdictions encompassed by the coverage formula which was originally designed to encompass jurisdictions that engaged in the most egregious voting discrimination in 1965, and Congress updated the formula in 1970 and 1975; and

WHEREAS, The Voting Rights Act of 1965's effects were wide and powerful; by 1968, nearly 60 percent of eligible African Americans were registered to vote in Mississippi, and other southern states showed similar improvement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.