



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 7, 2025

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OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXAS IS MERELY A SYMPTOM - VOTING RIGHTS ELIMINATION IS THE DISEASE!

DETROIT – Sixty years ago, March 15, 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, during a Joint Session of Congress said, *“At times history and fate meet at a single time, in a single place, to shape a turning point in a man’s unyielding search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was century ago at Appomattox, so it was last week in Selma, Alabama.”* This came shortly after “Bloody Sunday”, March 7, where civil rights activists peacefully marching for the right to vote were beaten and bloodied attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. This march helped to build an unstoppable determination, leading to the passage of the Voting Rights Act by the U.S. Senate August 4, and signed into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson August 6, 1965. Just a few days ago in the state of Texas, history and fate met once again. Only this time it is not about the right to vote. It is really about the right to choke the very life out of one person one vote to have true representation, the choice of the people, not that of a president or political party. Bigger than the state of Texas, it is really about the state of America. Demetria McCain, Director of Policy at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, *“Let’s be clear. Our democracy is only about to turn 60 when the Voting Rights Act anniversary gets here. I say that because there are so many attacks on voting rights, particularly as it relates to Black communities and communities of color.”* Will we go forward as a democratic nation, or will we succumb to the whims and demands of an authoritarian seeking to rule the nation? Sixty years ago, we witnessed the “Great Society” which truly made America great. Out of that summer was born Medicaid, Medicare, War On Poverty was moving forward, the Higher Education Act, Immigration and Nationality Act, Project Head Start, to name only a few advancements for our nation. Today, all these programs are being eliminated, reduced, or ignored by the intentional actions of an administration that would take us back, rather than move us forward.

We must not underestimate or miscalculate the danger we face as a people. Maps are targeting Austin, Dallas, Houston, and South Texas with sizable Black and Latino populations. They are not designed to include them in the process, rather exclude them from the process. Reducing the capacity of the people to vote their choice, placing them in districts that dilute their numbers, drawing lines that look more like a pre-assembled camel than a close-knit community should give us all great concern. While it may be true that both parties have participated in the process of gerrymandering, never has there been such a blatant demand from any President of the United States calling for five seats to be delivered to him by any means necessary. Oh, my bad! Lest we forget the 2020 election where on January 2, 2021, this same president in a phone call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, *“I just want to find 11,780 votes which is one more than we have.”* Now a similar request has been made to Texas Governor Greg Abbott to just find five seats saying, *“We are entitled.”* It didn't work then; it should not work now. Article 1 Section 2 of the United States Constitution mandates that an *“apportionment of representatives among the states be carried out every ten years.”* The apportionment results will be the first data published from the 2020 census, and those results will determine the amount of representation each state will have for the next ten years, not five years. Why are we leap frogging the constitution in Texas? Why is this same slick move being

proposed in other states? Is the current administration trying to consolidate and hold on to power due to its failed policies and a Big Bad Ugly Bill? The bill is now law but according to Politico, 61 % of Americans oppose it and only 39% say they support it.

The Voting Rights Act substantially increased voter turnout and voter registration among Blacks in particular and people of color in general. The gutting of part of the Act Section 4(b) of Section 5 by the United States Supreme Court in 2013 struck down the pre-clearance mandate for states to get permission before making sweeping changes to voting districts. All political hell has continued to be unleashed. Democrats from Texas who champion the cause to protect democracy and represent their people fairly are doing their job representing openly their constituents. Others in the United States Congress shut it down and went home early. They are also doing a job to openly stifle dissent by their constituents. The Texans are not running away like the Republican House led by Speaker of the House Mike Johnson and President Donald Trump. You can run but you can't hide the fact of not wanting to vote to release the Jeffrey Epstein files on this high-profile criminal sexual scandal. It is hypocrisy of the highest order to deflect and distract while at the same time releasing 243,496 pages, 6,301 pdf files, and 1 MP3 audio file of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., assassination. This is not a Democrat or Republican issue. This is an American issue. It is for this reason that the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021 should be passed and signed into law. It strengthens and restores part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. If we really want to ban gerrymandering in all its forms, then pass and sign into law the "Freedom To Vote" Act introduced by John Sarbanes in 2019, originally called "For The People Act" introduced as H.R.1. designed to expand voting rights, change campaign finance laws, reduce the influence of money into politics, bans gerrymandering, and creates new ethics rules for federal office. After passing the House, it was blocked in the Senate by then Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

This disease of redistricting can be stopped in its tracks. There is an effective vaccine. Its only cost is the vote of the people. This is the "good trouble" Congressman John Lewis spoke of. This is why Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stated, *"I cannot make up my mind. It is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to impact. I can only submit to the edict of others."* Now in 2025 we will not submit. Americans cannot standby hoping and praying that this disease simply goes away. It requires our hard faith and hard work to eliminate it from the body of our nation. We can do this. Let us remember the words of President Lyndon B. Johnson, *"Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose."* Let us choose to win.

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