

July 3, 2013

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Rep. Joe Armstrong (TN)
President

Sen. Catherine Pugh (MD)
President-Elect

Rep. Gregory Porter (IN)
Vice-President

Rep. Alan Williams (FL)
Secretary

Rep. Laura V. Hall (AL)
Financial Secretary

Rep. Howard Mosby (GA)
Treasurer

Sen. Hillman Terome Frazier (MS)
Parliamentarian

Rep. Dee Dawkins-Haigler (GA)
Chaplain

Rep. Barbara W. Ballard (KS)
Past President

REGIONAL CHAIRS

Rep. Ernest Hewett (CT)
Chair, Region I

Rep. Ron Waters (PA)
Chair, Region II

Del. Nathaniel T. Oaks (MD)
Chair, Region III

Rep. Karen Camper (TN)
Chair, Region IV

Rep. John R.C. King (SC)
Chair, Region V

Sen. Gloria Butler (GA)
Chair, Region VI

Rep. Willie J. Perkins, Sr. (MS)
Chair, Region VII

Rep. Ken Dunkin (IL)
Chair, Region VIII

Sen. Charleta B. Tavares (OH)
Chair, Region IX

Rep. Regina Barrow (LA)
Chair, Region X

Sen. David Haley (KS)
Chair, Region XI

Rep. Angela Williams (CO)
Chair, Region XII

Rep. Calvin Smyre (GA)
Ex-Officio Member

Rep. Mary Coleman (MS)
Ex-Officio Member

Rep. Lois DeBerry (TN)
Ex-Officio Member

LaKimba B. DeSadier
NBCSL Executive Director

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol, H-204
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Reid, Speaker Boehner, Senator McConnell and Representative Pelosi:

On behalf of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL), we would like to express our displeasure at the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, striking down the coverage formula within the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We strongly urge Congress to swiftly and fully restore this formula so that we may reestablish voting laws that have protected American democratic rights for almost half a century.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a cornerstone of our nation's civil rights laws. It is abundantly clear that preclearance provisions within the law continue to regularly protect Americans from discriminatory state and local voting practices. Current evidence has shown that the Voting Rights Act should be strengthened and expanded—not gutted. As recently as 2012, this review process has halted harmful voting provisions in several states that would have otherwise prevented many of the most vulnerable American citizens from voting. These instances demonstrate the continued need for preclearance protections under the law, but due to the *Shelby* ruling, millions of Americans are now again at risk of having their voting rights severely curtailed.

As state lawmakers, we are particularly sensitive to the ability and rights of states to manage our own affairs. Despite these abilities, it remains clear that without preclearance, large swaths of vulnerable citizens, including racial and ethnic minorities, seniors, and young people would be disenfranchised by proposed laws. Such disenfranchisement would only entrench itself over time, making it increasingly difficult to remedy such impacts on a state or local level alone.

As it stands, Congress has the explicit ability to course-correct where the Supreme Court erred. The Voting Rights Act, since its enactment, has stood as a hallmark of bipartisanship. Every time Congress has had the opportunity to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act, you have opted to strengthen it, including the most recent reauthorization in 2006.



We hope that you as leaders in Congress may be able to again work in a courageous and bipartisan fashion to restore full and robust voting protections for Americans. This unquestionably requires a renewal of Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act, including pertinent updates to best reflect current voting challenges, without weakening the remaining Voting Rights Act provisions.

President Lyndon B. Johnson called anti-voting laws the “last major shackle of those fierce and ancient bonds,” and called the Voting Rights Act “a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that has ever been won on any battlefield.” Unfortunately, the Supreme Court’s ruling has reversed much of this great victory, and hampered essential voting rights protections. It is now up to Congress to restore that triumph before our democracy is irrevocably tarnished. As fellow legislators, NBCSL stands ready to provide whatever assistance necessary to facilitate this important work.

Thank you. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Representative Joe Armstrong (TN)
President
National Black Caucus of State Legislators

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Rep. Joe Armstrong (TN)
President

Sen. Catherine Pugh (MD)
President-Elect

Rep. Gregory Porter (IN)
Vice-President

Rep. Alan Williams (FL)
Secretary

Rep. Laura V. Hall (AL)
Financial Secretary

Rep. Howard Mosby (GA)
Treasurer

Sen. Hillman Terome Frazier (MS)
Parliamentarian

Rep. Dee Dawkins-Haigler (GA)
Chaplain

Rep. Barbara W. Ballard (KS)
Past President

REGIONAL CHAIRS

Rep. Ernest Hewett (CT)
Chair, Region I

Rep. Ron Waters (PA)
Chair, Region II

Del. Nathaniel T. Oaks (MD)
Chair, Region III

Rep. Karen Camper (TN)
Chair, Region IV

Rep. John R.C. King (SC)
Chair, Region V

Sen. Gloria Butler (GA)
Chair, Region VI

Rep. Willie J. Perkins, Sr. (MS)
Chair, Region VII

Rep. Ken Dunkin (IL)
Chair, Region VIII

Sen. Charleta B. Tavares (OH)
Chair, Region IX

Rep. Regina Barrow (LA)
Chair, Region X

Sen. David Haley (KS)
Chair, Region XI

Rep. Angela Williams (CO)
Chair, Region XII

Rep. Calvin Smyre (GA)
Ex-Officio Member

Rep. Mary Coleman (MS)
Ex-Officio Member

Rep. Lois DeBerry (TN)
Ex-Officio Member

LaKimba B. DeSadier
NBCSL Executive Director