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August 23, 2018

Mr. J. Scott Peavy, Chair
Mr. Todd Black, Supervisor
Randolph County Board of Elections and Registration
93 Front Street
Cuthbert, GA 39840

Dear Mr. Peavy and Mr. Black:

We are writing to strongly object to the Randolph County Board of Elections and Registration's proposal calling for the closure of more than three quarters of the polling locations in the county—including one that is 97 percent African American. In a county where the median salary is slightly over \$30,000 and more than 60 percent African American, this plan appears to be a deliberate effort to disenfranchise an emerging and engaged demographic. It could also rightly be considered a violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). In light of the impending historic gubernatorial election in November, we are deeply concerned that the bedrock tenets of democracy would be under attack should this proposal be adopted and implemented.

This ostensible consolidation proposal raises several noteworthy questions that failed to receive a satisfactory explanation thus far. Randolph County residents have taken their civic duties seriously and used all nine of the polling locations in the county during the primaries held earlier in the year. Keeping that in mind, we are compelled to ask what criteria was considered when determining that seven of these polling locations were no longer necessary during a general election that is likely to generate even larger turnout? Given that the next closest polling locations could be more than 10 miles away and acknowledging that many residents lack access to a vehicle or adequate public transportation, we also ask if proximity to the next closest location was considered when advancing this proposal? Specifically, what is being done to ensure constituents are not unduly burdened by long wait times when trying to cast their vote and make their voices heard?

Unfortunately, this proposal is just the latest foray into the deeply problematic, well-coordinated playbook of voter suppression spearheaded by Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp and his ally Mike Malone. The former has played an instrumental role in cancelling tens of thousands of voter registrations and purging even more existing voters from the rolls by leveraging the same controversial racially biased technology Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach

made infamous for targeting Black voters. The latter was allegedly deployed by Kemp to provide a series of recommendations for poll closures across the state. Despite claiming that these recommendations were motivated by non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, they predominantly target areas with disproportionately high Black populations. The inextricable link between the two is clear—even though Kemp has now disavowed this racist strategy, documents provided to the Board of Elections state “consolidation has come highly recommended by the Secretary of State.” Unfortunately, this is merely a fraction of recent voter suppression actions being rolled out across the nation in the wake of *Shelby County v. Holder*.

By a 5-4 vote more than five years ago, the U.S. Supreme struck down Section 4 of the VRA, making Section 5 of the law essentially unworkable. Section 4’s coverage formula was designed to determine which states would be required to preclear with the Department of Justice any modifications made to voting practices. Unsurprisingly, because of a history of abysmal voter turnout and nefarious tactics intended to impede robust civic engagement, the state of Georgia, and Randolph county, were specifically obligated to fulfill this requirement for decades. As Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg stated in her dissent to the *Shelby* decision, “throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.”

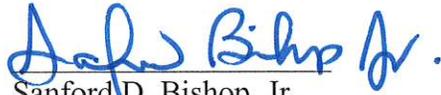
Despite Chief Justice Roberts’ claim that the Voting Rights Act coverage map is “based on 40-year-old facts having no logical relationship to the present day,” the high court is not entirely responsible for the corrosive nature of state actions we have witnessed lately. In its aftermath, former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder’s Department of Justice (DOJ) continued to leverage the remaining elements of the statute to conduct oversight and hold jurisdictions engaging in voter suppression tactics accountable. Predictably, under Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ leadership, DOJ has conspicuously failed to sustain this focus with any rigor or meaningful commitment. By wholly abdicating its responsibility to protect the American people from the impact of racially charged voter suppression, there is no longer any federal government mechanism or resource dedicated to protecting an individual’s constitutionally protected right to vote. In the absence of Congress restoring or updating Section 4 as the Supreme Court majority decision implored it to do, we will continue to see states accelerate procedures that blatantly violate voters’ rights.

From Ohio, to Wisconsin, to Kansas, the vestiges of Jim Crow have resurfaced under a new cloak unchecked and unabated. While these states are no longer conducting literacy tests, the effects of their new policies are nearly as precise and effective. As such, we strongly urge the Randolph County Board of Elections and Registration to reconsider this ill-fated proposal and reverse course expediently to avoid the fallout of long lines, wait times, and depressed turnout. Democracy as we know it is at stake and must be protected at all costs—despite the Trump Administration’s calculated refusal to do so.

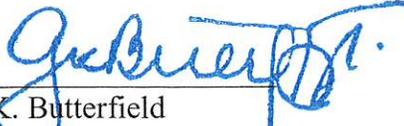
Sincerely,



Cedric L. Richmond
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus



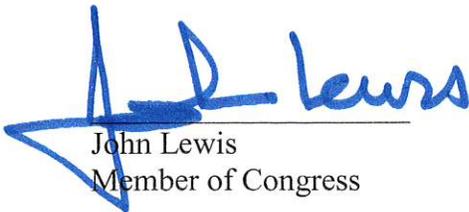
Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



G.K. Butterfield
Co-Chair, CBC Voting Rights Task Force



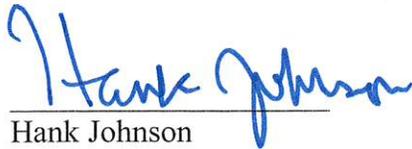
Terri Sewell
Co-Chair, CBC Voting Rights Task Force



John Lewis
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress



Hank Johnson
Member of Congress