



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG

June 24, 2021

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write to you as you consider various proposed legislation to ensure the right to vote is available to all citizens in our democratic society. While we take no position on any pending legislation, the U.S. bishops wrote in our teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*:

[i]n the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. . . . Participation in political life in light of fundamental moral principles is an essential duty for every Catholic and all people of good will.

Recognizing the importance of ensuring the integrity of elections processes, protecting voting rights is a moral imperative for the common good of a just society. The human right to vote flows from the inherent dignity of each citizen.

As long-time supporters of the Voting Rights Act, and as we commented¹ on the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 133 S. Ct. 2612 (2013), we encourage you to go forward in productive dialogue to ensure that legal and other hurdles do not obstruct *any* eligible Americans from exercising their right to vote in form or effect. In addressing the *Shelby* decision, the bishops wrote that “[t]he recent Supreme Court decision necessitates that Congress act swiftly to assure that the right to vote be protected and afforded to all eligible citizens.” The bishops also urged “policymakers to quickly come together to reaffirm the bipartisan consensus that has long supported the Voting Rights Act and to move forward new legislation that assures modern and effective protections for all voters so that they may exercise their right and moral obligation to participate in political life.”

The National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), a predecessor to the USCCB, partnered with multiple religious organizations to support the Voting Rights Act of 1965, along with several other pieces of civil rights legislation. Fr. John Cronin, who at the time served as Associate Director of NCWC’s Social Action Department, testified on behalf of the organization to the House Judiciary Committee in support of the groundbreaking Act.²

¹ See, Bishops Stephen E. Blaire and Daniel E. Flores, “On Supreme Court Decision on Voting Rights: ‘Participation in Political Life Is A Right and Moral Obligation’ State U.S. Bishops,” USCCB (July 3, 2013). <https://www.usccb.org/news/2013/supreme-court-decision-voting-rights-participation-political-life-right-and-moral>.

² See, Rev. John F. Cronin, Testimony on Voting Rights Act before House Judiciary Committee (March 25, 1965). <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Testimony%20of%20Fr.%20Cronin%20on%20Voting%20Rights%20Action-03-25-1965.pdf>

Letter to Congress

June 24, 2021

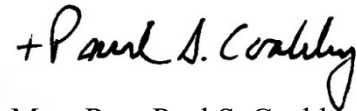
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We reemphasize today, as Fr. Cronin did in his testimony over fifty years ago, that “[t]he right to vote is a human right which is guaranteed by the basic law of the land,” and we urge you to revisit his entire testimony as you consider legislation protecting this basic right.³

As was also recognized in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, “[i]t is important for our society to continue to combat any unjust discrimination . . .” and in particular, “[w]here the effects of past discrimination persist, society has the obligation to take positive steps to overcome the legacy of injustice, including vigorous action” and, among other things, to give special protection of voting rights for people of color.

We stand ready to work with you in furtherance of passing voting rights legislation with modern and effective protections that will ensure that all citizens are afforded their right to vote.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development



Most Rev. Shelton J. Fabre
Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux
Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism

³ See, e.g., *id.* at 506 (“Therefore, we urge that the formula prescribing the geographical areas to be covered be broad enough to apply to all areas in which persons attempting to register and to vote experience difficulty because of race or color. We believe that any provision that would unnecessarily delay and complicate the prompt registration of citizens is intolerable... These observations flow from our concern to condemn clearly and unequivocally the injustice of voting discrimination and to call for a remedy that is both prompt and completely effective.”)