

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

AUGUST 4, 2015

Proclaim August 2 – 8, 2015 as “Voting Rights Act Week” in Los Angeles County

In 1870, Congress ratified the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, which declared that the right to vote shall not be denied or abridged on the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Despite this constitutional right, African Americans, especially those living in the South, continued to face voting discrimination and barriers, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, violence, and intimidation, that were intended to disenfranchise the African American community.

Nearly a century later, on August 6, 1965, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law by President Johnson to ban discriminatory voting policies at all levels of government. This was as a result of the courage of the men, women and children who were the life blood of the Civil Rights Movement and who organized in the trenches to realize the promise of the right to vote, as exemplified in the unprovoked attack of peaceful marchers by armed state troopers in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965, on what is now called “Bloody Sunday”.

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MOTION

SOLIS _____

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In 1975, Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act was added to require jurisdictions with large number of voters not yet fluent in English to provide translated election materials and language assistance to ensure that language minorities are not disenfranchised from the electoral process.

Today, fifty years after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed, there has been an upsurge in voting barriers such as strict identification requirements, cuts to early voting programs, restrictions on voter registration and barriers to voting by formerly incarcerated individuals that, on the surface, may appear mundane, but in fact, are meant to suppress voting, especially among voters of color and young voters. Some jurisdictions continue to refuse to convert from at-large to district-based elections where minority rights are diluted.

H. R. 2867, the "Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015" was introduced in Congress on June 24, 2015, which would update the Voting Rights Act to address modern-day voting discrimination and strengthen the Voting Rights Act's transparency and protections for historically disenfranchised voters, voters who rely on languages other than English, and voters with disabilities.

The fundamental principle of proportional representation, historically understood as "one person one vote" is also under attack in the *Evenwel v. Abbott* case. In this case, only eligible voters rather than the entire population would be counted in drawing legislative districts in the redistricting process, which would lead to millions of ineligible children and immigrants being politically marginalized.

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The 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is an opportunity to remind the electorate not to take voting for granted or lightly and that it must be exercised regularly to keep democracy inclusive, strong and vibrant.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Proclaim August 2 – 8, 2015, as Voting Rights Act Week in the County of Los Angeles in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965;

Instruct Los Angeles County’s Washington D.C. advocates to support H. R. 2867, “The Voting Rights Advancement Act”; and

Instruct County Counsel to track the *Evenwel v. Abbott* case before the United States Supreme Court and file or join an amicus brief in support of the principle of proportional representation based on population.

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(RT)