

Sikh American Organizations Support the Voting Rights Amendment Act

May 20, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

As national, state, and local Sikh organizations that collectively represent the hundreds of thousands Sikhs in America, we write to share our strong support for the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (H.R. 3899/S.1945) and urge its swift passage by both chambers of Congress.

For the Sikh community, the fight for the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote, is a critical part of our history in the United States. In 1923, Bhagat Singh Thind, a veteran of World War I, went to the U.S. Supreme Court to challenge racist laws that denied U.S. citizenship, including voting rights, to immigrants from Asia. In 1957, Dalip Singh Saund became the first Asian Pacific American Congressman and the only Sikh American to serve following years of advocacy for the right to become a citizen and have a vote and a voice in his country.

We are inspired not only by our history in America, but the values of our faith. Our scripture tells us to remember that all are equal, with an equal voice. "It is the Divine's command, that no one should dominate or subjugate another; every one is equal. Let all abide in peace, under this Benevolent Rule." (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Page 73).

The Supreme Court's recent decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which struck down a key provision of the VRA and stripped critical protections for voters, reminds us that our work is far from done. Chief Justice Roberts called upon Congress to develop a new formula. Every day that passes without this new formula new voting procedures are proposed and implemented. At best, they are unreported and unscrutinized; at worst they are outright discriminatory.

This bill is not perfect. We remain concerned that voter ID laws are treated differently from other potentially discriminatory policies and that a "known practices" formula, which would provide recourse against some of the most common discriminatory practices, is not included. Yet, we firmly believe that now is the time to build on the critical tools in this legislation by working together to strengthen the overall bill and stop discriminatory voting practices wherever they occur.

Voting rights legislation has long been—and continues to be—a shining example of bipartisan unity. We urge you to support the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (H.R. 3899/S.1945) and see that its modern, commonsense provisions are swiftly enacted. If you have any questions, please free to contact Navdeep Singh, Policy Director at the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), at navdeep@saldef.org or 202-393-2700 x 128.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jakara Movement

Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)

Sikh Coalition

Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE)

Sikh Research Institute

Surat Initiative

UNITED SIKHS