



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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July 10, 2006

The United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to urge the House to renew the Voting Rights Act. I understand it is scheduled for floor consideration this week. It is critical that the vote occur this week. I urge all members to vote for it and oppose any weakening amendments.

The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 (H.R. 9) was reported to the House by the Judiciary Committee under the leadership of Chairman Sensenbrenner with overwhelming bipartisan support. Reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act is necessary to preserve and protect the right to vote for all Americans.

The Catholic bishops are proud of our past leadership role in securing civil rights, including the right to vote. "No Catholic with a good Christian conscience can fail to recognize the rights of all citizens to vote," wrote the Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (predecessor of the bishops' Conference) in 1963. Portions of the Voting Rights Act were last renewed in 1992, with the support of the bishops' Conference. Our Conference has continually emphasized the importance of voting and the right and responsibility of each citizen to vote, and has encouraged dioceses, parishes and other Catholic institutions to participate in non-partisan voting registration efforts.

Given the merits of the legislation and the strong bipartisan backing for reauthorization, it was deeply disappointing that the bill was not able to come to the House floor for a vote last month. The right to vote is essential to our democracy, and H.R. 9 protects this right. I urge you to vote to renew and restore this vital law.

Sincerely,

Most Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee