

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Chairman Jamie B. Raskin Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Hearing “Democracy in Danger: The Assault on Voting Rights in Texas” July 29, 2021

Good morning. Thank you to our witnesses for being with us today for this truly historic hearing. Before we begin, I want to take a moment to remember my good friend, Bob Moses, who passed away on Sunday. Bob was a hero of the civil rights movement and a personal hero of mine. In the 1960s, he helped plan the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, a massive voter registration drive aimed at ensuring every eligible voter in that state could cast their ballot. As a thank you for his efforts, he endured unimaginable cruelty and violence. Despite this, he spent the next 4+ decades fighting for equality.

Bob Moses is, sadly, only the latest titan of civil rights that we have lost in recent years, following our dear colleagues, Chairman Elijah Cummings, and Representative John Lewis. Just as we are losing these vanguards of democracy, we are watching legislatures in state after state work quickly to undo their life’s work. Their legacy. We are here today to make sure that does not happen.

We are here to examine the voter restrictions that are pending in the Texas legislature, and our obligation as Members of Congress to respond forcefully to restrictive voting laws in Texas and elsewhere by passing [the John Lewis Voting Rights Act](#) and the [For the People Act](#).

Earlier this year, Republicans in Texas unveiled perhaps the most aggressive set of voting restrictions anywhere in the country. Included in their proposed legislation were dramatic restrictions on mail-in voting, including stringent voter ID requirements; increased criminal liability for individuals who seek to help their family or friends cast a ballot; enhanced protections for partisan poll workers who intimidate voters; and additional limits on how election officials to encourage voter participation. In the first draft of the legislation, Republicans even sought to restrict early voting hours on Sunday—a clear attempt to hamstring Black churches’ “souls to the polls” turnout operation.

All of this, despite zero evidence – zero – that there is widespread voter fraud in Texas. In fact, a top deputy to Gov. Abbott’s handpicked Secretary of State testified under oath that the 2020 elections in Texas were, quote, “smooth and secure.” Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who volunteered to take Trump’s claims of a stolen election to the U.S. Supreme Court, had his office spend over 22,000 hours investigating fraud in 2020, nearly double their efforts in 2018. Yet they’ve launched only 16 prosecutions—none of which have resulted in jail time.

Republicans in Texas are open about how their anti-democratic intentions are based in naked partisanship. Just this month, a Texas state legislator introduced a bill calling for a forensic audit of the state’s 2020 results—only in large counties mainly won by President Biden. When asked why he hadn’t included all counties, he said, “What’s the point? I mean, all the small counties are red.”

“All the small counties are red.”

Democratic state representatives in Texas—including our witnesses today—organized a courageous walkout in May to deny Republicans a quorum at the end of their legislative session, preventing passage of the voting bill that would strip their constituents of access to the ballot. In response, Governor Abbott convened a special session on July 8 to pass this draconian election overhaul. Democrats once again denied the legislature a quorum, this time by coming here to urge us to protect voting rights before it is too late. They’ve done this at great personal cost, by abandoning their lives and livelihoods as Governor Abbott baselessly threatened their arrest. But blocking a quorum is not a permanent solution.

They are here to pass us the baton, and to buy us a little more time to do our job and pass the [For the People Act](#) and the [John Lewis Voting Rights Act](#).

The cost of inaction could not be higher. The voting restrictions in the Texas bills will disproportionately impact voters of color. Restrictions on voter assistance will potentially criminalize normal interactions between friends and family members who may require assistance to cast a ballot because they are not proficient in English, which will have devastating consequences for voter engagement in Latino communities. You cannot out-organize a law that criminalizes you for helping your grandmother get to the polling booth.

Limits on what local election officials can do to prevent intimidation by partisan poll workers will also leave Black and brown voters vulnerable. Just last year, leaked video showed Texas Republican officials aimed to organize “election integrity brigades” to send 10,000 largely white poll watchers to monitor communities of color in Houston. Imagine how many brigades there will be once poll workers have, as the ACLU of Texas puts it, a “one-time get out of jail free card for voter intimidation.”

Finally, this bill prohibits reforms that were successfully implemented last year by Houston’s Harris County—such as drive-thru and 24-hour voting—that were mainly utilized by Black and Latino voters. The Texas Civil Rights Project estimates that over half of all ballots cast using those methods were cast by voters of color, in contrast to the overall early vote.

This zealous pursuit of Jim Crow 2.0 is now a national crisis. According to the Brennan Center, 18 states have enacted 30 laws restricting voting rights so far this year. More are on the way. We must fight back against the voter suppression campaign sparked by the Big Lie before it is too late. The future of our democracy depends on it.

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