



Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

1629 "K" St., NW, Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone: 202/466-3311
Fax: 202/466-3435
www.civilrights.org

FOUNDERS

Arnold Aronson*
A. Philip Randolph*
Roy Wilkins*

OFFICERS

CHAIRPERSON
Dorothy I. Height

VICE CHAIRPERSONS
Antonia Hernandez
Judith L. Lichtman
William L. Taylor

SECRETARY
Horace Deets

TREASURER
Gerald W. McEntee

COUNSEL EMERITUS
Joseph L. Rauh, Jr.*

HONORARY CHAIRPERSONS
Marvin Caplan*
Benjamin L. Hooks
Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr.*

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Barbara Arnwine
Lawyers' Committee For Civil Rights Under Law

Sandy Bernard
American Association of University Women

Elizabeth Birch
Human Rights Campaign

Robert Chase
National Education Association

Christine Chen
Organization of Chinese Americans

Robert W. Edgar
National Council of Churches

Kim Gandy
National Organization for Women

Marcia Greenberger
National Women's Law Center

Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins
League of Women Voters

Jacqueline Johnson
National Congress of American Indians

Elaine R. Jones
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.

George Kourpias
Alliance for Retired Americans

Leon Lynch
United Steelworkers of America

Kweisi Mfume
NAACP

Laura Murphy
American Civil Liberties Union

Ralph G. Neas
People For The American Way

Hugh B. Price
National Urban League

David Saperstein
Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Richard Womack
AFL-CIO

Patrisha Wright
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

Stephen P. Yokich
International Union, United Automobile Workers of America

Raul Yzaguirre
National Council of La Raza

COMPLIANCE/ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE

Karen Narasaki, *Chairperson*

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Wade J. Henderson

OFFICE MANAGER
Lisa M. Haywood

POLICY/RESEARCH ASSOCIATE
Karen McGill Lawson

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST/
DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMS
Brian Komar

(*)Deceased

February 13, 2002

RE: Election Reform

Dear Senator:

We are writing on behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), to urge your support for the Dodd-McConnell Substitute Amendment to S. 565, the "Equal Protection of Voting Rights Act." As discussed in more detail below, while we strongly support Senate action on the substitute amendment, we have several serious concerns about certain provisions of the bill which must be addressed before final passage. The LCCR is the nation's oldest, largest and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, with over 180 national organizations representing persons of color, women, persons with disabilities, labor organizations, older Americans, gays and lesbians, major religious groups and civil liberties and human rights organizations. The enactment of meaningful election reform is one of the LCCR's highest legislative priorities.

As we now know, during the Election 2000 millions of American citizens were denied their basic right to cast a vote and to have that vote counted. As numerous studies of Election 2000 have shown, many of the voting irregularities that have been identified disproportionately affected racial minorities, persons with disabilities, the elderly and citizens who speak languages other than English. Moreover, the significant problems that were exposed in the nation's voting system were not confined to any one locality or jurisdiction. Regrettably, over a year has passed since Election 2000, and yet few states have enacted meaningful election reform.

In this time of crisis, both at home and abroad, it is especially appropriate that the Senate work to adopt the Dodd-McConnell election reform amendment after addressing the concerns outlined below. Having identified significant problems with our voting system, the strength of our democracy depends, in part, on Congress' ability to enact meaningful election reform.

The LCCR strongly endorses the adoption of minimum national voting standards. Specifically, the Dodd-McConnell amendment will require three things. First, all states must adopt important voting standards for voting system technology. Second, all states and local jurisdictions must provide provisional balloting, notifying voters of the opportunity to cast a provisional ballot if their eligibility to vote is in question on election day. Third, all states are required to maintain computerized state-wide voter lists that are readily available on election day. This statewide list is essential to ensuring the accuracy of the voter rolls and protecting against fraud. In addition, the substitute amendment contains provisions that would dramatically increase voter accessibility and thus guarantee the right to vote for language minority citizens and citizens with disabilities.

"Equality in a Free, Plural, Democratic Society"

United States Senate
February 13, 2002
Page two

While the LCCR supports immediate Senate action on the Dodd-McConnell substitute, we do have several remaining concerns regarding specific provisions currently in the substitute amendment. In particular, the LCCR opposes Section 103 (b) of the Dodd-McConnell substitute, because requiring the use of photographic identification and/or other documents as a pre-condition for voting would have a disparate impact on voters with disabilities, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans. While the provision is intended as an anti-fraud measure, there are other more acceptable ways of addressing concerns about fraud; and if left unaddressed, the provision will result in discrimination and prevent voter participation. We are also concerned about legal loopholes in the amendment which undermine existing law, such as the Voting Rights Act, and we strongly urge that this provision be corrected. In addition, we are also concerned about the "safe harbor" provision of the amendment, which we believe will have harmful consequences for enforcement of this and other critical voting rights laws. However, while we are fully committed to working with the bill's sponsors, as well as the rest of the Senate, to build upon the bill's obvious merits, these are concerns that will need to be addressed as we move forward toward passage of this legislation and protecting the voting rights of all Americans.

There is no truer testimony to the greatness of our democracy and our nation than the realization of the fundamental principle that every American citizen has the right to vote. At a time when our faith in democracy and our country have never been more important, we must protect, preserve and promote this most basic right of all Americans.

We urge your immediate action on this important issue and assistance in addressing our concerns. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
AFL-CIO
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of Retired Persons
American Civil Liberties Union
Cuban American National Council
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Women Voters
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense Fund
National Congress of American Indians
National Council of Churches
National Council of La Raza
Paralyzed Veterans of America
People for the American Way
Public Citizen
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
United Auto Workers
United Cerebral Palsy
U.S. Public Interest Research Group