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May 17, 2006

Senator Arlen Specter
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
SD-244 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
SD-152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Leahy:

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the reauthorization of the temporary provisions of the Voting Rights Act. I attended your first hearing on this issue and have been following the subsequent hearings with interest. However, I regret that some witnesses as well as Senators continue to quote a few words of my testimony in the case of the *Georgia v. Ashcroft*, take them out of context, and improperly imply that I do not favor reauthorization of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act or that my words justify their opposition to Section 5. I take issue with the use of my name to justify opposition to the renewal of Section 5 and assure you that I am a strong supporter of that provision.

The Voting Rights Act was necessary in 1965, and, unfortunately, it is still necessary today, as the extensive Committee record in both the House and the Senate makes clear. We have come a great distance, but we still have a great distance to go before all Americans have free and equal access to the ballot box. I want to ensure that the Senate Judiciary Committee record accurately reflects my support for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act and my unwavering support for H.R. 9 and S. 2703.

The vote is the most powerful, nonviolent tool that our citizens have in a democratic society, and nothing but nothing should discourage, hamper or interfere with the right of every citizen to cast a vote for the person of their choice.

The history of the right to vote in America is a history of conflict, of struggling for the right to vote. Many people died trying to protect that right. I was beaten, and jailed because I stood up for it. For millions like me, the struggle for the right to vote is not mere history; it is experience.

The temporary provisions of the Voting Rights Act, including Section 5, have been vital to the success of the Voting Rights Act. We have come a long way in Georgia and around the country and my deposition statement aimed to acknowledge that progress. However, the extensive House and Senate Judiciary Committee Records on this issue tell us that the struggle is not over and that the special provisions of the Voting Rights Act are still necessary. We should not take a step backward, when there is still much to be done to ensure every vote and every voter counts. We cannot afford to slide back into our dark past. In a recent case in my state of Georgia, a federal court judge found that the voter ID bill enacted by Georgia Legislature was the equivalent of a modern day poll tax. Judge Harold Murphy wrote "in reaching this conclusion, the Court observes that it has great respect for the Georgia Legislature, the Court, however, simply has more respect for the Constitution." In light of this, and Georgia's history under Section 5 since 1982, it is clear that the Voting Rights Act must be strengthened and reauthorized.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to protect the voting rights of all Americans, by reauthorizing and strengthening the provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

Sincerely,


John Lewis
Member of Congress