



July 13, 2006

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Member of Congress:

As pastors and leaders of predominately African American congregations across the country, we are writing urging you to fully support the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 (H.R. 9) and oppose all amendments attempting to change Section 203.

When Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act in 1965, it recognized that the right to vote is one of the most fundamental rights that our nation bestows upon its citizens. It is imperative that those representing citizens of America do all they can in their power to uphold that fundamental right, a right that extends to all citizens regardless of race, ethnicity or national origin. Robbing voters of their right to vote and to have their vote counted undermines the very foundation of our democratic society.

Section 203 helps ensure that all American citizens have the ability to cast an informed ballot, including communities such as Native Americans and Native Alaskans, by offering translations of non-partisan voter information materials and ballots. For the African American community, there was a time in our not so distant history when poll taxes and literacy tests were used as tools to discriminate against our community and keep us away from the polls. Today, those same forces are attacking our brothers and sisters in the Native American, Asian, Alaskan and Hispanic communities by suggesting that Section 203 be repealed or limited. Changing Section 203 would amount to a modern day literacy test for millions of American citizens today.

Further, the majority of Americans requiring language assistance are native born citizens. Their needs are due mostly to educational inequities, not citizens' lack of effort to learn English. In fact, most American citizens who speak English as a second language want to become fluent, and are attempting to do so, as evidenced by the overflowing enrollment in English language assistance programs throughout the country. American citizens should not be denied the right to cast an informed ballot as they improve their English skills. By altering Section 203, and excluding hundreds of thousands of citizens from casting an informed ballot, the message will become crystal clear to all Americans: while the tools of discrimination may have changed, they still have the same chilling effect on democracy.

Democracy thrives when its citizens are informed and knowledgeable. America is a better place when we all understand what we are voting on. Section 203 passed with wide bi-partisan support in the House Judiciary Committee. Let us continue in that same spirit of collective understanding and do the only thing that is conscionable to do: re-authorize the Voting Rights

Act and oppose all amendments to Section 203. Please do not allow a fringe group of lawmakers to roll back years of voting rights protections that people have fought and died to preserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Timothy McDonald
Chair
African American Ministers in Action

Rev. Robert Shine
Co- Chair
African American Ministers in Action