



VOTING RIGHTS

When the Voting Rights Act was passed nearly 50 years ago, poll taxes and literacy tests were among the tactics used to prevent African Americans and other racial and language minorities from voting. The record-breaking turnout in the 2008 presidential election, especially of minorities, has spurred a new onslaught of voter suppression efforts. Modern day efforts to block access to the polls have taken many forms, including photo identification requirements, reducing the number of days for early voting, restrictions on third-party voter registration activities, systematic purges of registered voters, challenges to student voters as nonresidents, and unfounded allegations of voter fraud. The ACLU works to counter these voter suppression measures through lobbying, litigation, and public education.

Challenging Voter IDs: “Let Ruthelle Vote!”

Ruthelle Frank had voted in every election since 1948—until Wisconsin enacted one of the most restrictive voter ID laws in the country. When she tried to obtain the necessary ID to vote in her local 2012 election, a misspelling on her birth certificate stopped her. To fix the problem, she would have had to pay combined legal and state fees of about \$200.

Ruthelle could have paid those fees—but she condemns them as a poll tax. Instead, she joined the ACLU as lead plaintiff in our landmark federal challenge to Wisconsin’s voter ID law, just one of a handful of cases to ever challenge such laws under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

In May 2014, we won at the trial court. A federal judge ruled that the law placed a unique burden on Wisconsin’s black and Latino

voters and potentially prohibited 300,000 voters in the state from casting a ballot.

Unfortunately, the state won on appeal, overturning our victory. But we successfully persuaded the U.S. Supreme Court to put the law on hold for the 2014 elections. Together with Ruthelle, we will continue the fight to ensure that all eligible voters in Wisconsin—and around the country—can easily exercise their right to vote.



Ruthelle Frank is challenging Wisconsin’s voter ID law. Voter ID laws and other suppression measures threaten to block the votes of 5 million people around the country, particularly the elderly, people of color, the poor, students, and people with disabilities.

Standing Up for Fair Elections

Ostensibly designed to combat a nonexistent epidemic of voter fraud, new voter suppression laws instead threaten to keep an estimated 5 million eligible voters from the polls, especially people of color, the poor, the elderly, students, and people with disabilities.

In 2013, despite the ACLU's best efforts, the U.S. Supreme Court disabled Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires certain states and counties to get clearance from the U.S. Department of Justice before changing voting rules. At least six of the 15 affected states introduced new voting restrictions within 48 hours of the Court's ruling. Other states have followed suit, and the bad laws keep multiplying.

We chose to challenge North Carolina's 2013 voter suppression law because it imperils the votes of nearly 900,000 North Carolinians—over a third of them

African-American. And we're taking on other egregious suppression measures in 12 states, including Kansas, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

We're also aggressively pushing Congress to restore Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. And we are using the National Voter Registration Act to get states to offer voter registration to people participating in state health exchanges established under the Affordable Care Act. Using every tool at our disposal, the ACLU will fight to protect people whose voting rights have been thrown into serious jeopardy.

Defending Minority Voting Rights

- The ACLU has defended the voting rights of minorities for most of our history. We challenged the “poll tax”—designed to prevent black Americans from voting—decades before a constitutional amendment abolished the practice in 1964, and we have been the primary enforcer of the Voting Rights Act.
- In 1964, we won the landmark case *Reynolds v. Sims* before the U.S. Supreme Court, securing the principle of “one person, one vote.”
- In 1972, we won a Supreme Court case, *Dunn v. Blumstein*, invalidating Tennessee's one-year residency requirement for registration and voting, a device used to deter voting by blacks.
- In *Hunter v. Underwood*, the Supreme Court struck down an Alabama law in 1985 that disenfranchised people convicted of misdemeanors involving “moral turpitude”—a pretext to deny blacks the vote.
- In 1986, we won a federal court ruling invalidating “at large” elections in Montana because they diluted the voting strength of American Indians.
- In 2014, we permanently blocked Pennsylvania's voter ID law that threatened to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters and won a state Supreme Court ruling striking down Arkansas' voter ID law.

