



Advocacy Update

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Court Strikes Down Texas Voter ID Law

Last week, the D.C. Circuit Court struck down an onerous and potentially costly Texas voter identification law. Due to a history of discriminatory practices, Texas is one of 16 states or districts of states whose voting and elections laws must be approved by the Justice Department. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act requires the Justice Department to “pre-clear” new election laws in covered states, counties, and districts to ensure the new rules do not discriminate based on race, color, or language.

After the Justice Department refused to allow the Texas law to proceed, the state appealed to the D.C. Circuit Court, which ruled that the law violated Section 5. In response to this decision, Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center, said: “No election should be won or lost based on the exclusion of eligible voters. Barriers at the polls are a violation of a basic principle of our democracy; our country relies on the participation of its citizenry in choosing elected officials, without regard to race, gender or geographic location.”

The URJ, CCAR, and WRJ have been constant voices in support of equal voting rights for all, and all three organizations have passed resolutions calling for the strengthening of voter education, an increase in polling place accessibility, and the development of clear standards for counting a vote.

Support America's Anti-Hunger Programs

Anti-hunger programs governed by the Farm Bill, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), help millions of individuals and families keep food on the table in spite of harsh economic conditions. In 2010, more than one in five children in America was hungry. In December of 2011, more than 46.5 million Americans participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. There is a great and unmistakable need for anti-hunger programs, and Congress must make sure that strong funding for SNAP and other anti-hunger programs are included in the Farm Bill.

The Torah and Jewish tradition are explicit in the command that we feed the hungry and help eradicate hunger from our society. Leviticus 23:22 tells us, "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I the Eternal am your God." WRJ has also spoken clearly and often about the need for comprehensive programs to address hunger and malnutrition, noting in our 1969 resolution entitled "Hunger" that "hunger and malnutrition are needless and morally outrageous."

Contact your Representative and urge him or her to oppose cuts to anti-hunger programs in the 2012 Farm Bill.

L'Dor v'Dor: Champion the Poor and Needy

In honor of Labor Day, read Rabbi Saperstein's thoughts on the role of workers in our society, and what Judaism says about the need for fair working conditions, the right of workers to bargain collectively, and the need for all workers to be treated with dignity, be paid a living wage and to work in a healthy, safe and secure workplace. Rabbi Saperstein notes: "Jews have played a heroic role in building the North American labor movement" and asks us to recall our tradition's teaching to “Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:9).

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home