

CITIZENS' RIGHT TO VOTE: A CALL TO ACTION

At its Stated Meeting on May 19, 2022, the Pittsburgh Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted the following call to action, to be circulated to churches and legislators:

We Christians of the Pittsburgh Presbytery, recalling Christ's commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves and not neglect "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith," declare our commitment to upholding the civil rights of all Americans, including the hard-won right to vote, which is now being threatened across our land.

Hundreds of bills have been introduced in state legislatures recently that will make it difficult, and in some cases practically impossible, for many eligible citizens to vote. Such measures echo a long, unjust, and violent history of efforts to keep African Americans and other people of color, especially, from voting, restricting their access to the representation we all need to protect our rights and freedoms.

These bills are put forth in the name of ensuring election integrity, though study after study has shown that our recent elections have been overwhelmingly free and fair. Very little fraud has been found through in-person or mail-in balloting, and former Attorney General William Barr said there was no evidence of wrongdoing that would have changed the outcome of the 2020 election. Legislative or other efforts that have the effect of keeping people from voting amount to disenfranchisement, regardless of what their proponents claim.

A democratic republic should make it easier, not harder, for all its eligible citizens to vote, and voters should be able to choose their representatives through elections; but in the rampant practice of gerrymandering, politicians try to choose their own voters and make access to the polls easier for their supporters and harder for opponents.

Our Presbyterian Church has long supported civil rights, including the right to vote. In the 1950s, the church became acutely aware of the catastrophic consequences of not speaking out against practices that kept millions of Americans from the ballot box and other civil rights. A 1959 General Assembly urged voting rights for all citizens of voting age, and the church supported the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its renewal in 2006 (passed 98-0 in the Senate, 390-33 in the House). Again in 2008, the General Assembly called for measures "providing greater accessibility for all voters."

Governments at every level need to make voting safe, secure, and easily accessible for all citizens. Congress can help by passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, the For the People Act, and the Freedom to Vote Act, or comparable legislation, and state legislatures must not be allowed to twist voting procedures for partisan advantage. We call upon our representatives at all levels of government to guarantee the fundamental right to vote for every eligible American.