Over 90 Criminal Justice Leaders Condemn State Voter Suppression Efforts

Elected prosecutors and law enforcement leaders say voter suppression undermines public safety and call on state and federal policymakers to protect voting rights

Today, 95 elected prosecutors and law enforcement leaders – including Attorneys General, District Attorneys, Police Chiefs and Sheriffs – issued a joint statement that condemns efforts by state legislatures across the country to limit and criminalize voting and calls on local and federal policymakers to protect and expand voting rights, including by passing the For the People Act and the John Lewis Act. The joint statement notes that despite the lack of any evidence of widespread voter fraud, these voter suppression laws are being introduced and passed on a scale unseen since the Jim Crow era. Nearly every state legislature has seen voting restrictions introduced in 2021 and at least 14 states have passed laws making voting more difficult. These respected criminal justice and law enforcement leaders have come together to urge action to “protect a fundamental right of our democracy,” noting that “doing nothing is simply not an option.”

“At a time when our country faces so many challenges, including the ongoing recovery from a global pandemic, it is unconscionable that legislators would waste time and resources making it harder for Americans – and particularly people of color – to exercise their right to vote,” said Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution, the organizer of the statement. “Creating even more unnecessary barriers to voting undermines faith in our government and criminal legal system, thereby jeopardizing public safety. An attack on the vote is an attack on our democracy, and leaders of good conscience cannot stand by while these rights are eroded.”

Signatories to the statement include the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives and the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP); Attorneys General Hector Balderas (New Mexico), Rob Bonta (California), Thomas J. Donovan, Jr. (Vermont), Keith Ellison (Minnesota), Aaron Ford (Nevada), Maura Healey (Massachusetts), Mark Herring (Virginia), Letitia James (New York), Kathleen Jennings (Delaware), Karl Racine (District of Columbia), Kwame Raoul (Illinois), Ellen Rosenblum (Oregon) and Josh Shapiro (Pennsylvania); Police Chief RaShall M. Brackney (Charlottesville, Va.); Sheriffs Jerry L. Clayton (Washtenaw County, Mich.), Garry McFadden (Mecklenburg County, N.C.), Javier Salazar (Bexar County, Texas) and Steven Tompkins (Suffolk County, Mass.); former
Executive Director of the Major Cities Chiefs Association Darrel Stephens; former Executive Director of the National Black Police Association Ron Hampton; and District Attorneys, State Attorneys and other elected local prosecutors from around the nation.

The signatories highlight the disproportionate impact these voter suppression laws have on communities of color and people in poverty, who have a more difficult time meeting ID requirements and who are more likely to take advantage of mechanisms like early voting and same day voter registration. They note that these restrictions “evoke one of the darkest chapters in American history, when law enforcement officials in the Jim Crow era blocked Black citizens from accessing the polls.”

“Efforts to suppress people’s fundamental right to vote threatens the trust that I work every day to build with the community that I serve,” said Mecklenburg County, N.C. Sheriff Garry McFadden, one of the signatories on the statement. “As so many of us in law enforcement strive to move towards a more just democracy and criminal legal system, restrictions on voting only take us backwards.”

The signatories also emphasize that laws restricting voting are “a solution in search of a problem.” They point out that attempts to criminalize aspects of the voting process – like Georgia’s criminalization of giving food and water to voters waiting in line at the polls – are wasteful and divert limited law enforcement and prosecution resources away from addressing serious crimes.

“My community put me in office to pursue and promote justice. Imposing criminal penalties and fines that not only have zero public safety benefit but that appear to be calculated to suppress Black Americans’ ability to vote is not only unjust, but also makes us all less safe,” said Georgia’s Western Judicial Circuit District Attorney Deborah Gonzalez, a signatory on the statement and a former Georgia State Representative.

“We need to make voting easier and more accessible, not add more obstacles to exercising this fundamental right. Our vote is sacred. Every elected official must fight to protect it,” added District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine, another signatory on the joint statement.

Read the joint statement here and see the full list of signatories below.

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Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP’s work, visit our website and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

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