

# The Voting Rights Act

## Protect the Law that Protects Our Right to Vote

Millions of Californians rely on the protections of the Voting Rights Act. In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act in the wake of Alabama state troopers inflicting brutal violence on peaceful civil rights marchers. The Voting Rights Act has been widely regarded as one of the most effective and important civil rights laws. Martin Luther King called federal support for the Voting Rights Act “a shining moment in the conscience of man.” **However, three sections of the Voting Rights Act will expire in 2007 unless Congress renews them.**

These three sections:

- Require certain states and counties to get federal approval before changing their election laws and procedures (Section 5).
- Guarantee that citizens who need language assistance are not denied access to voting (Sections 203 and 4f4).
- Give the United States Attorney General the power to send federal examiners and observers to monitor elections (Sections 6 to 9).

***If Congress fails to renew these protections, it will jeopardize the ability of millions of Californians to exercise their right to vote and elect candidates who represent them—and turn back the clock on 40 years of progress.***

### Forty Years of Progress in California

The Voting Rights Act outlawed poll taxes and literacy tests that discriminated against minority voters. ***The Act also opened the doors of elected office to historically underrepresented communities.*** For example, the number of African American elected officials in California more than doubled from just over 100 in 1970 to over 220 in 2001. The number of Latino elected officials in California doubled from less than 500 in 1984 to 1,000 today, and the number of Asian American elected officials tripled from less than 90 in 1980 to more than 270 today.



### The Voting Rights Act Prevents Discrimination From Harming Voters in California

The Voting Rights Act requires four counties in California (Kings, Merced, Monterey and Yuba) to obtain approval from federal officials before they change election procedures. Just before the 2003 recall election, Monterey County officials planned to close more than a dozen polling places in minority neighborhoods. Because of the Voting Rights Act, these polling places were kept open. ***This federal approval requirement protects the rights of almost one million Californians who live in these four counties.***

### Ensuring That All Voters Have a Voice

Many English-speaking voters struggle with California's complicated election materials. Examples include the 135-candidate ballot used in the 2003 recall election and the 2004 presidential election ballot containing 16 statewide propositions. This struggle is even greater for Native American, Asian American and Latino citizens who need language assistance. The Voting Rights Act preserves the right of these voters to cast informed ballots. ***If Congress fails to renew the temporary sections of the Act,***

***voters in 26 counties in California will be at risk of being excluded from the voting process.***

### Learn More and Get Involved

A number of organizations are organizing a conference on the Voting Rights Act. ***The conference will take place in Los Angeles on February 4, 2006.*** People from all parts of California are invited to attend. By attending this conference, you can learn more about the Voting Rights Act and get involved with grassroots efforts to renew and restore the Act. To receive more information about the conference, please send an email to [info@calvec.org](mailto:info@calvec.org) or call (213) 747-7606 ext. 138 or toll-free (866) 952-4222. You can also visit [www.calvec.org](http://www.calvec.org).