

**CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT  
MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Intergovernmental Relations Committee

**FROM:** Jeff Coyle, Assistant City Manager

**SUBJECT:** John Lewis Voting Rights Act

**DATE:** September 13, 2021

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The City's Government & Public Affairs Department will provide a briefing on the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and an update on recent Congressional action regarding the legislation.

Background

In a 2013 decision, the Supreme Court of the United States nullified a formula in the Voting Rights Act which determined which states had to receive federal preclearance of any new election and voting laws. The Supreme Court left it to Congress to develop a new formula for the selection of states that would fall under Voting Rights Act preclearance.

In 2019, during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, legislation called the *Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2019* was filed. The legislation established new criteria to determine which states were required to obtain preclearance. The bill passed the House but did not advance in the Senate.

On August 17, 2021, Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) introduced H.R. 4, the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (JLVRAA)*. This legislation would restore the protections of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA)* that were removed by the Supreme Court's 2013 decision and more recently in a 2021 decision. The JLVRAA outlines a new, expanded formula that the Department of Justice (DOJ) can use to identify discriminatory voting patterns in states and local jurisdictions. Those entities would then need to get DOJ approval before making further changes to elections. The bill also includes a provision designed to counter the 2021 Supreme Court ruling that made it harder to challenge potentially discriminatory voting changes.

On August 24, the U.S. House passed the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (JLVRAA), with a 219-212 party line vote. However, the JLVRAA is not expected pass in the Senate.