

**Written Testimony respectfully submitted to the House Committee on
Government Operations and Military Affairs by**

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On this 22nd day of April, 2026

Good afternoon, Members of the Committee:

Voting is one of the most significant freedoms in American democracy and is a fundamental First Amendment right guaranteed to its citizens. Sadly, it took generations for us to guarantee the right to vote for certain populations. Now is not the time to move backwards. Democracy is on the line.

In this moment, we know what is at stake if the current administration has their way. We appreciate the spirit of the Vermont Voting Rights Act; this act is essential to protect Vermonters' right to vote.

As we know, the SAVE America Act is a threat to democracy and, if passed in the Senate, will likely disenfranchise millions of Americans by:

- Upending ongoing primary elections, as requirements would come into effect immediately upon signing bill into law
- Effectively ending vote-by-mail processes, including in states that already have similar voter ID laws in place
- Creating obstacles for voters who need to register or update voter registry where their current name does not match name at birth
- Disenfranchising voters, especially rural voters, who are less likely to have a passport
- Requiring states to submit voter registration lists to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for verification.

The Secretary of State in each state is responsible for ensuring access to voting for all eligible voters; sending voter registration lists to the federal government is not part of the responsibility of that office.

At every turn, we are bearing witness to the ways the federal government intends to interfere with upcoming elections. Our United States postal system has also been compromised, with changes in the location, manner and time when

outgoing mail is postmarked. There are very serious consequences for the many methods to disenfranchise and challenge voting rights, and invalidate ballots and votes cast.

The Vermont Progressive Party believes that much of the spirit of the original Senate bill provided a more comprehensive approach to protecting voting rights in Vermont, though it left out a critical protected class. The current version in the House is a skeleton of the original bill and is now titled “Voter Protections Act” rather than “Voting Rights Act”.

One significant feature that needs to be added into the bill is recognition of the serious structural disadvantages people living with disabilities face in registering to vote, and voting in Vermont.

Vermont ranks 49th in access to the ballot for people with disabilities, and [50th in the nation for voter turnout gap for disabled voters](#). Language needs to be added to classify Vermonters living with disabilities as a protected class under definitions, to spell out “Protected class” means a group of citizens protected from discrimination based on race, color, disability or membership in a language minority group.

Title II of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides all people with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in all services, programs, and activities of state and local governments. Voting and meeting access is a huge cornerstone of this. [This is further underscored by four other federal laws including the federal Voting Rights Act.](#)

As previously shared by Laura Cushman, Staff Attorney at Disability Rights Vermont, “The disabled community is one of the most underrepresented groups in our society and they deserve equal access to voting rights as their peers — Vermont’s VRA will address systemic barriers that prevent fair and representative participation in democracy.” Laura was referring to a previous version of the Senate bill.

The [legislative priorities of the Vermont Human Rights Commission](#) included recommendations for universal Australian ballot and universal hybrid meeting access for local elections. [Here is draft language for this section of the legislation.](#)

We encourage all members of the Committee to review the [Disability Rights Addendum to the Act 133](#), Working Group Executive Summary Report.

There are other features that were included in the S.298 as introduced that should be reconsidered.

Vermonters need to have access with language assistance to vote. Voters over the age of 65 should have accommodations at polling sites. There should be a private cause of action for voters who are intimidated, threatened, or coerced by another person. Section 2853 of S.298 as introduced regarding communication of false information to registered voters should be included.

We would like to see the House work to include additional protections in this legislation, and work with the Senate Judiciary Committee to include language from H.541, originally introduced by Reps. Goodnow and Nugent.

Respectfully, as written, the Voter Protections Act of 2026 has been diluted and needs to be rewritten to guarantee voting rights for ALL Vermonters and protect Vermonters at the polls.