

**BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
FOR MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON**

**PROCLAMATION NO. \_\_\_\_\_**

**Recognizing the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act and Proclaiming August 6-12, 2015 as Voting Rights Week in Multnomah County, Oregon.**

**The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners Finds:**

- a. President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965. Section 2 of the Act, which closely followed the language of the 15th amendment, applied a nationwide prohibition against the denial or abridgment of the right to vote on the literacy tests on a nationwide basis. Among its other provisions, the Act contained special enforcement provisions targeted at those areas of the country where Congress believed the potential for discrimination to be the greatest.
- b. By 1965 concerted efforts to break the grip of state disfranchisement had been under way for some time, but had achieved only modest success overall and in some areas had proved almost entirely ineffectual. The murder of voting-rights activists in Philadelphia, Mississippi, gained national attention, along with numerous other acts of violence and terrorism. Finally, the unprovoked attack on March 7, 1965, by state troopers on peaceful marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, en route to the state capitol in Montgomery, prompted the President and Congress to overcome Southern legislators' resistance to effective voting rights legislation. President Johnson issued a call for a strong voting rights law and hearings began soon thereafter on the bill that would become the Voting Rights Act.
- c. The historic Voting Rights Act of 1965 sought to terminate a 97-year-long period of unconstitutional and deceitful maneuvers in particular Southern states, which deterred African-American citizens from exercising their right to participate in democratic affairs. The ratification of the Fourteenth (1868) and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments to the United States Constitution prohibited voting restrictions on the basis of race. However, many states failed to acknowledge these federal rulings. Prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the perceptible influence of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments collapsed under the pressure of the underhanded, institutional tactics employed in several states. These arrangements included but were not limited to poll taxes, the grandfather clause, arbitrary registration practices and comprehension tests, mob violence, and "white primaries". As a result, in 1940 only 3 percent of voting-age black men and women in the South were registered to vote.
- d. Two summers ago, the United States Supreme Court reviewed the case *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), and struck a fundamental portion of the Voting Rights Act, ruling it unconstitutional in a 5-4 vote. Section 4(b), the portion under

scrutiny, was used to establish that jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination would be subject to the preclearance requirement defined in Section 5. Section 5 required these jurisdictions to demonstrate that proposed voting changes were not discriminatory. The Supreme Court ruling effectively nullified both sections. In the months that followed, 8 of the 15 states in question implemented new voting restrictions. Texas was particularly quick to pass its strict voter ID law, which it had been unsuccessfully battling for since 2011. This law is considered to be a major step backward, as it has been shown to discourage economically-disadvantaged people from voting.

- e. In light of these assaults, we must remain steadfast and ever-vigilant in our defense of this most fundamental of rights.
- f. Multnomah County supports the endorsement and commemoration of The Voting Rights Act of 1965, a treasured memento of the Civil Rights Era, which has stood in our nation as a beacon of hope and equality for exactly 50 years to this day.

**The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners Proclaims:**

August 6-12, 2015 as Voting Rights Week in Multnomah County, Oregon.

**ADOPTED this 6<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2015.**

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON**

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Chair Deborah Kafoury

**SUBMITTED BY:** Commissioner Loretta Smith, District 2