

**GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2018
ARCHIVES' RESEARCH REPORT**

RESOLUTION NO.: 2018-D003
TITLE: Addressing the Issue of Voter Suppression
PROPOSER: Canon Richard Miller
TOPIC: National Concerns

Directly Related: (Attached)

2015-A182 Address Systemic Racial Injustice
2006-A094 On the Topic of the Right of All Citizens to Vote (Rejected)

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

None

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1976 through 2015, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives at 800-525-9329 before Convention or at Convention in the General Convention Secretariat.

D003 Addressing the issue of Voter Suppression

Proposer	Canon Richard Miller
Topic	National Concerns
Endorsed by	Mathis, Canon Jill; Gaines, Ms. Carolyn
Sponsored by	
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RESOLUTION TEXT

1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That this 79th General Convention of The Episcopal Church hereby directs and encourages the adoption, on a state-by-state basis, of the following package of reforms that would expand voter registration, increase voter eligibility, and make voting processes more accessible by: implementing automatic voter registration; enabling same-day voter registration; preparing for natural disasters; allowing online registration; expanding the circle of people who are eligible to vote; making it easier to vote by mail; enabling no-excuse absentee voting; creating long-term mailing lists for absentee voters; making it easier for people to vote early, in person; enabling weekend voting and extended hours; and, guaranteeing an adequate number of voting locations.

EXPLANATION

The Voting Rights Act's passage was a signature accomplishment of the civil rights movement, the Supreme Court's 2013 decision in the case, known as *Shelby v. Holder*, effectively invalidated Section 5 which required state, county and local governments with histories of discrimination (as well as other more technical factors) to submit any changes to voting laws to federal authorities for approval; and The current administration is using its bully pulpit to falsely allege that millions of ballots were cast illegally and to suggest that early voting should be cut down. Under the current administration's leadership, politicians with records of aggressively curtailing voting rights will be shaping federal policies; and

At the state level, emboldened by *Shelby v. Holder*, certain politicians have long been leading a sustained assault on voting rights. In state after state, these politicians have pursued a consistent and ambitious agenda to curtail voting rights, an agenda that includes requiring voter IDs, cutting early voting hours and locations, slashing Sunday voting, and eliminating same-day voter registration. It also includes restricting urban counties' ability to open additional polling sites and purging voter registration rolls through the use of manipulative and overly zealous techniques. It extends to bans on straight-ticket voting, one byproduct of which is longer voting lines, and on ballot harvesting, a practice by which individuals collect absentee ballots filled by other voters so as to deliver them to election authorities.

A brief explanation of each of the reforms asked for in the above Resolution is as follows:

Implement automatic voter registration (AVR): Since March 2015, six states have adopted legislation to automatically register citizens when they come into contact with governmental agencies, notably a

Department of Motor Vehicles. Oregon, the first state to adopt this reform (after years of advocacy by the Oregon-based Bus Federation), has registered 225,000 people this way since the start of the year 2016. The payoff: 43 percent of those new voters cast ballots on November 8, 2016.

Enable same-day voter registration (SVR): Same-day voter registration allows qualified residents to register to vote or update their existing registration on Election Day.

Prepare for natural disasters: Absent same-day voter registration bills, rules should provide for the automatic extension of voter registration deadlines in counties where a natural disaster is declared in the weeks leading up to an election. Last year, Florida's Republican Gov. Rick Scott and North Carolina's state elections board denied extensions in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. New rules could limit such gamesmanship.

Allow online voter registration: Many states still provide no procedure by which residents can register to vote or update their voter registrations online. Remedying this situation is very feasible since Republicans have been willing to get on board with adopting online registration systems, as they did in Florida in 2015.

Expand the circle of people who are eligible to vote. Restore felons' voting rights: A recent report by the Sentencing Project laid bare the urgency of countering felon disenfranchisement rules. Two and a half percent of all American adults are disenfranchised, and the share of African Americans who are disenfranchised is triple that (7.4 percent), a disparity that is in keeping with the origins and history of the practice. In four Southern states with severe disenfranchisement laws — Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia — the share of disenfranchised black adults surpasses 20 percent, more than double that of white adults.

Absent the above step, a range of incremental reforms beckon. The most urgent is to restore voting rights to people who have completed their sentences. In Virginia, one of four states to permanently disenfranchise individuals with felony convictions, Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe has used his executive authority to achieve this objective. In August, he began issuing thousands of restoration orders on an individual basis after a narrow ruling by the state Supreme Court blocked him from issuing a blanket clemency; he has said he will continue to mail individual restoration orders to more than 200,000 people.

Make it easier to vote by mail. Implement all-mail voting: In three states (Colorado, Oregon, and Washington), election authorities mail a ballot to every registered voter. This far-reaching step could be pursued in states like California that already conduct a large share of their elections by mail. States that don't wish to go that far in privileging mail voting can take intermediary steps — enabling no-excuse absentee voting where it is not yet available, and creating long-term absentee voter lists.

Enable no-excuse absentee voting: Twenty states — many of them states where Democrats wield political influence, including Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island — require that voters provide a reason they can't vote on Election Day in order to receive an absentee ballot. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is now advocating legislation to implement no-excuse absentee voting in the Empire State, a minimal step that these 20 states should prioritize.

Create long-term mailing lists for absentee voters: The idea behind absentee ballot standing requests is that when a voter requests an absentee ballot in a given year, authorities then continue to automatically send them absentee ballots into the future. This can encourage turnout from voters who tend to only cast a ballot in the fall of a presidential election year, and it makes voting more accessible

to people with disabilities, as a recent study documented. In some states, like Florida, requests expire after a few general elections, which can lead to some confusion. A handful of other states, such as California, allow voters to be put on an absentee ballot list permanently.

Make it easier for people to vote early, in person. Thirteen states provide no option to cast a ballot in person before Election Day. Democrats already enjoy some power in many of these states, including Connecticut, Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Schneiderman's proposal to create a two-week early voting window in New York is an urgent starting point for consideration.

Enable weekend voting and extended hours: Early voting ought to be helping people who struggle to find the time to vote on Election Day Tuesdays, especially if they fear the long lines that disproportionately affect predominantly minority precincts. But simply adding more voting hours during other weekday working hours cannot meet that goal. Extended voting hours on weekdays are needed, as well as weekend voting.

Guarantee an adequate number of voting locations: In Ohio, each county is restricted to only one early voting location, no matter its physical size or population. Giving local county boards more leeway to open additional voting sites can be helpful to ensuring that highly populated counties are adequately served, but obstacles such as inequities in the allocation of statewide resources or the lack of representativeness of some counties' elected officials loom large. Voting rights advocates should champion statewide benchmarks as to a minimum number of polling places per resident and per physical distance, require a minimum number of voting machines at each voting location, and put in place rules to ensure an adequate allocation of state resources.



Resolution Number: 2015-A182
Title: Address Systemic Racial Injustice
Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended
Final Text:

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church recognize that many Episcopalians find it challenging to understand or know how to respond to 21st century systemic racial injustices that still occur in multiple contexts including but not limited to education; employment; housing; health care; banking; voting rights; immigration; policing, courts, and prisons, etc.; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention affirms that the Gospel, our Baptismal Covenant, and our Marks of Mission call individuals, churches, dioceses, provinces, and the wider Church to find more effective and productive ways to respond to racial injustice as we love our neighbors as ourselves, respect the dignity of every human being, and transform unjust structures of society; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention declare that “not knowing” and “not having the eyes to see and ears to hear” are serious obstacles to transforming unjust structures and therefore direct the Church at every level for this triennium to commit to increase the use of study, education, research, anti-racism training, liturgies, and Christian formation instruction that specifically address systemic racial injustice; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention urge the Church at every level to increase the number of dialogues about systemic racial injustice it has with local, state and national bodies within the public and private spheres and that these dialogues be used to identify, examine, and offer correctives to policies and practices within and among these bodies that result in systemic racial disparities and injustices; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention urge dioceses and congregations to create vehicles for listening to diverse neighbors and developing reconciling relationships; such options might include (a) listening campaigns in local communities, (b) partnerships with churches and organizations comprised predominately of a different race or culture (especially those targeted by oppression), (c) neighborhood prayer walks, (d) storytelling and speak-out events designed to facilitate truth-telling, healing and action, (e) and others with which leaders throughout the Church are familiar; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention encourage Justice and Advocacy Ministries to partner with other church offices and organizations as appropriate to host, resource, and moderate an ongoing online forum for Episcopalians dedicated to the ministry of racial justice and reconciliation, with spaces dedicated to sharing about local and diocesan efforts and resources; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention encourage Justice and Advocacy Ministries to partner with Youth Ministries to commission a gospel-centered, Internet-integrated, action-oriented, anti-racism youth ministry curriculum for congregations throughout The Episcopal Church, including those not in the United States, to be provided in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music produce and post online a set of prayers for racial reconciliation and justice, suitable for inclusion in the Prayers of the People; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention urge the Executive Council to conduct its own internal audit to assess to what extent, if at all, racial disparities and systemic racial injustices exist within the Church (including but not limited to clergy salaries and deployment); and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention request that the Executive Council report back to the 79th General Convention on the results of the internal audit; what concrete steps it and the wider Church took to address systemic racial injustice in the wider culture; and how effective those steps were.

Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), pp. 438-439.



Resolution Number: 2006-A094
Title: On the Topic of the Right of All Citizens to Vote
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 75th General Convention support federal statutory protection for the right of all citizens to vote in local, state, and federal elections, ~~especially provisions prohibiting imposition of discriminatory practices or identification requirements;~~and be it further

Resolved, That ~~these actions be communicated to the Office of Government Relations for action and distribution to the Episcopal Public Policy Network~~agencies of *The Episcopal Church* at all levels be encouraged to support these actions.