



Clergy Emergency League Statement Regarding Racist Voter Suppression Laws in Georgia and Other States

March 29, 2021

*“Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees.” - Isaiah 10:1*

The [Clergy Emergency League](#) (CEL) denounces the passage of a voter suppression law in the state of Georgia that is designed to disenfranchise communities of color and criminalize those who offer water and food to voters waiting in line. We also denounce state legislators who are supporting more than 250 similar bills in 43 states designed to make voting more difficult, especially in communities of color. We call for clergy to speak out against these disenfranchisement attempts and to join in efforts to restore and expand access to the right to vote.

Georgia’s sweeping law puts restrictions on voting absentee by mail, including requiring photo ID; criminalizes the act of giving food and water to voters waiting in line; and gives the legislature greater control over how elections are run, which could make it easier for officials to tamper with the results. Under the guise of the blatant lie that the 2020 elections were “stolen,” the executive and legislative branches in Georgia have enacted a law that will disproportionately harm historically disenfranchised communities, young voters, and voters with disabilities.

For Christians concerned with the freedom of religion, the clause criminalizing the giving of water and food to those in line to vote is especially pernicious because it is a direct affront to our faith. Jesus taught his followers that “whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward” (Matthew 10:42, cf Mark 9:41). Our faith teaches us that all people are valuable in the eyes of God, should have their interests fairly represented by those elected to serve, and should be supported as they exercise their right to vote. Additionally, Sen. Rev. Raphael Warnock reminds us that “a vote is a kind of prayer for the kind of world we desire for ourselves and our children.” Just as our prayers are stronger when we pray together, our nation is stronger when all eligible citizens are allowed to vote.

The efforts of Georgia’s elected leaders and other state houses to make the nation less democratic is a direct assault on human rights. Such efforts move our country further toward racist authoritarianism. The bitter history of racist voter suppression efforts in America originated with the institution of slavery itself. From the designation of slaves as three-fifths of a

human being in the Constitution, to the Jim Crow laws that legalized racial segregation in the post-Civil War era, to the gutting of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Black, Brown, and Indigenous citizens in the U.S. have been denied full access to voting rights – and thus their human rights – since the founding of this country.

The modern Hebrew word for “vote” – *qol* – is the same word for “voice” in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, voting is what enables the voices of the people to be heard. Yet, as Sen. Rev. Warnock points out, due to “voter suppression laws and tactics, including partisan and racial gerrymandering, [and] a system awash in dark money and the dominance of corporatist interest and politicians who do their bidding, the voices of the American people have been increasingly drowned out and crowded out and squeezed out of their own democracy.” Therefore, the Clergy Emergency League also calls on the U.S. Senate to vote in favor of the For the People Act, already passed by the House, that would expand voting rights, strengthen campaign finance laws, and limit partisan gerrymandering. Enacting this legislation will help to protect the right to vote, and thus the voice of the people, as well as the dignity endowed by God in each of us.

Called by our faith and by the teachings of scripture, the Clergy Emergency League denounces all efforts of voter suppression as manifestations of systemic and structural racism and the disruption of democracy. Clergy and congregations have a moral obligation to defend every citizen’s right to vote, to advocate for removing all barriers to voting access, and to call for the expansion of voting rights as a matter of faith and human dignity.

About the Clergy Emergency League: The Clergy Emergency League (CEL) is a grassroots network of nearly 2,500 clergy speaking out against the abuses of power at the federal, state, and local levels. Specifically, we resist the fusion of politics with radical, right-wing, fundamentalist Christianity, and the growing power of racist white nationalism and a militarized police state. We provide support, accountability, resources, and networking for clergy to prophetically minister in their congregations and the public square in this time of political upheaval, social unrest, and partisan division. Learn more at www.ClergyEmergencyLeague.com.

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