



June 11, 2025

VIA EMAIL

Assembly Oversight, Reform, and Federal Relations Committee
New Jersey State House
125 W. State Street
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

RE: John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act (A4083)

Dear Chair Reginald W. Atkins and Vice-Chair Roy Freiman:

On behalf of the Asian Pacific American Lawyers Association of New Jersey, Inc. (APALA-NJ), the South Asian Bar Association of New Jersey (SABA-NJ), and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA), we write in strong support for the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey (A4083). We are organizations dedicated to advancing the interests of the over one million Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities here in New Jersey and nearly 20 million throughout the country. A4083 will benefit not only AANHPIs, but *all* communities in the state in the exercise of the cherished right to vote.

New Jersey is one of the most diverse states in the country, and that is in large part due to the AANHPI populations who call the Garden State home. AANHPIs make up more than [10 percent](#) of the state's residents and have been fastest growing demographic group in the country. New Jersey is home to the nation's fourth largest Asian American population, which accounted for a massive [83% share of the state's overall growth](#) over the

past two decades. Importantly, approximately [a half million Asian Americans](#) in New Jersey are eligible to vote, constituting 8% of the electorate, and up to 20% of the citizen voting age population in areas like Middlesex County.

Barriers to voting, however, persist for the Asian American population in New Jersey. Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act requires certain jurisdictions within this state to provide in-language voting materials for populations with significant Limited English Proficient (LEP) voters, including in Bergen County (in Korean) and Middlesex County (in Gujarati).

The John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey (A4083) will strengthen and enhance such language rights protections for Asian American communities by increasing linguistic resources for populations where more than either 4,000 persons or 2% of the voting age population belong to single-language minority groups. This threshold improves on federal law, aligns with recent legislation in New York and Connecticut, and importantly, provides a mechanism to increase civic engagement and foster democracy for New Jersey's Arabic, Korean, Bengali, and Gujarati speakers as well as for other populations.

This focus on language equity is particularly critical to our organizations and constituents. Approximately one third of all Asian Americans in this country are LEP. Indeed, within the AANHPI populations, linguistic differences abound with over 100 distinct languages and dialects spoken amongst the 50 or so AANHPI ethnic groups. We need to understand and recognize the differences in our populations in order to best serve them. The [range of Limited English Proficiency varies](#) from 27% of those from India to an overwhelming 77% of Burmese Americans who struggle with English.

Limited English Proficiency by vulnerable persons creates particular challenges in accessing public services and the justice system. The high cost, limited availability, and inconsistent quality of interpreters prevent these populations from exercising the rights and privileges of residency and citizenship. A4083 ensures these barriers will be reduced at the ballot box.

Although New Jersey has in recent years passed measures to strengthen its democracy, such as implementing early voting, increasing voting by mail, and restoring the right to vote for those on parole and

probation, voters of color, voters with disabilities, and those whose first language is not English still face unequal barriers to the ballot box across the state. As the United States Supreme Court and other federal courts have weakened the federal Voting Rights Act, it is now imperative that the state protect its voters, especially its voters of color, through state law. New Jersey has the opportunity right now to join the growing list of states moving forward to protect the fundamental right to vote in their own communities.

This strong New Jersey-specific voting rights act will: (1) establish a state “preclearance” program that makes local governments with a history of discrimination prove to the state that certain changes to the voting process would not harm voters of color before they go into effect; (2) provide new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting rules and procedures in court; (3) expand language access and assistance for voters with limited English proficiency so that they can fully participate in the democratic process; (4) pass strong protections against intimidation, deception, or obstruction at the polls for voters and election workers; (5) create a public, central database for election and demographic data information that would empower officials and communities to ensure accessible elections; and (6) make sure local and state voting laws, procedures, and regulations do not deny voters of color and other protected categories of voters the right to cast their vote.

If passed, A4083 would be one of the most comprehensive state-level voting rights acts in the country, building on successful laws already on the books in Virginia, New York, Connecticut, California, Washington, and Oregon.

Enacting A4083 will strengthen New Jersey’s democracy and help cement New Jersey’s national leadership on voting rights, at a time when too many states are moving backwards. And, most importantly, it will help New Jersey voters more equally access the ballot and protect their fundamental right to vote.

Among eligible voters, Asian American Pacific Islanders AANHPIs are the fastest-growing electorate in the United States. AANHPIs are socioeconomically, generationally, and politically diverse, and far too often ignored as a voting bloc, but this legislation will give voice to our communities

and make the state stronger and more reflective of the great and diverse citizens who live here.

Therefore, we strongly urge this Committee to pass the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey (A4083). If you have any questions, please contact advocacy@napaba.org.

Respectfully,

**ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN
LAWYERS ASSOCIATION OF
NEW JERSEY, INC. (APALA-NJ)**

By: /s/ Allan C. Zhang
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President, APALA-NJ

**SOUTH ASIAN BAR
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By: /s/ Mishita Jethi
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