



Allegheny County Council

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Legislation Text

File #: 11931-21, **Version:** 1

Motion of the Council of Allegheny County urging the United States Congress to undertake action on a number of legislative items with all deliberate speed.

Whereas, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act (“VRA”) was introduced in the 114th Congress as H.R. 2867, in the 115th Congress as H.R. 2978, and the 116th Congress as H.R. 4 and S. 4263, and would function to restore and strengthen parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in the wake of the invalidation of a technical provision of the VRA by the United States Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013). Ultimately, the Act would function to restore the Voting Rights Act of 1965's requirement that certain states pre-clear certain changes to their voting laws with the federal government, but the bill has yet to be reintroduced in the 117th Congress; and

Whereas, the For the People Act was introduced in both the House of Representatives (as H.R. 1) and the Senate (as S. 1) in the 117th Congress. Intended to expand voting rights, reform campaign finance laws in order to reduce the influence of campaign funding in politics, limit the potential for gerrymandering along partisan lines, and create new ethics rules for federal officeholders, H.R. 1 passed in the House on March 3, 2021, but the process of voting on the bill was blocked in the Senate via filibuster on June 22, 2021; and

Whereas, the Emmitt Till Antilynching Act would categorize lynching as a Federal hate crime, and was initially introduced in the House of Representatives during the 116th Congress as H.R. 35 and in the Senate as S. 488. On February 26, 2020, H.R. 35 passed the House by a vote of 410-4, but the Act was prevented from passing by unanimous consent in the Senate by the vote of a single Senator. The bill has been re-introduced in the 117th Congress as H.R. 55, and as of the date of introduction of this Motion, it remains pending before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security; and

Whereas, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 was introduced in the 117th Congress as H.R. 1280, and would institute a number of measures intended to reduce the incidence of police misconduct, use of disproportionate force, and racial bias in policing, including empowering the U.S. Department of Justice to issue subpoenas to police departments to aid in “pattern or practice” investigations relating to use of force, establishing a Federal registry of police misconduct reports and disciplinary actions, restricting the application of qualified immunity to law enforcement officers, prohibiting Federal law enforcement officers from using chokeholds, prohibiting the issuance of no knock search warrants in Federal drug investigations, and altering the threshold for the permissible use of force by Federal officers from a reasonableness standard to only when necessary to prevent death or serious injury. H.R. 1280 was passed by the House on March 3, 2021 and forwarded to the Senate, which has yet to take any action on the bill as of the date of introduction of this Motion; and

Whereas, while it is not the intention of Council to in any fashion minimize the significance of recent actions by Congress - such as the formal institution of Juneteenth as a Federal holiday through the passage of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act (Pub.L. 117-17) - to bring issues of racial equity into its public discussions, it is the judgment of Council that the bills described herein are all substantive actions relating to issues that are legitimately and tangibly related to the health, safety, and well-being of large portions of the

American public, and that a government for, by, and of the people owes that public no less than full and open discussion of and final votes upon these items, regardless of the outcome of those votes; and

Whereas, it is further the judgment of Council that the repeated and systematic avoidance of final action upon bills like the four referenced herein serves to undermine public confidence in the institution of Congress, and runs directly contrary to the most fundamental principles of representative democracy;

The Council of the County of Allegheny therefore hereby moves as follows:

Allegheny County Council hereby urges the United States Congress to reintroduce the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, and to undertake the process of discussing and voting on that bill, together with the For the People Act, the Emmitt Till Antilynching Act, and the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021 with all deliberate speed.