



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT**

### **WE MUST PROTECT THE RIGHT TO VOTE!**

Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony, President, Detroit Branch NAACP

**DETROIT** – It has been 56 years since the signing of the Voting Rights Act. Fifty-three years since the Prince of Peace Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while he defended the rights of sanitation workers. Eleven years since the horrendous ruling of Citizens United allowed the ravages of light and dark financing from businesses, corporations, and individuals to determine the outcome of elections based on their free speech. It has been 8 years since the ruling of Shelby vs. Holder gutting Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It mandated the pre-clearance of any state historically engaged in racial discrimination to change its rules or alter its process for citizens to vote. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment clearly states, *“the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on the count of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”* The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment also states, *“the right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President, Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the US or any state by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.”* These are only two of several amendments that address the very fundamental right of U.S. citizens. It appears that Michigan legislators have not gotten the memos. They are in direct violation of these and other amendments. They are also violating their own personal oath in which they are sworn and affirmed to support the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the state of Michigan.

We are facing a political pandemic. We are facing a virus that is spreading like COVID-19 seeking to consume the very life out of our democracy in over 47 states. They have placed democracy on a ventilator that provides not greater access but rather a grand scheme to suppress the rights of a select group of Michiganders. Who would have thought that we would be fighting again for the very right to vote in the year 2021? These proposed 39 bills are without the input of any clerks, democratic or republican, or the Secretary of State of Michigan. They do not include any of the recommendations for Voter Advancement proposed by the Michigan Secretary of State. Voting rights are what John Lewis crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge for. These rights are what Fannie Lou Hamer was just sick and tired of being sick and tired for. This very right is what Rosa Parks sat down on the bus and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for. This right is what Medgar Evers was shot down in his driveway for. This right is really what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed in Memphis Tennessee for, while standing for the rights of sanitation workers often neglected but who would be respected. This right is what the Civil Rights Movement was fought and won for. This right is what our children are depending upon us for. In the words of Sweet Honey in the Rock, *“We who believe in freedom must not and cannot rest until it comes.”* Our hearts continue to ache, as we pay witness to the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis.

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We are not allowed to complete the mourning process because of the unnecessary death of 20-year-old Daunte Wright. He was killed while unarmed by a Minneapolis police officer, over an air freshener in the back of his car and two misdemeanor warrants from traffic violations. We must not stand by and watch the murder of hope and the killing of our dreams for democratic change on the streets of Georgia, Texas, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and yes, on the very pavement throughout the state of Michigan. We have come too far to let any voter suppressers turn us back. Dr. King's words continue to shadow the history of this moment. *"Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But conscience asks the question, 'Is it right?' And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because one's conscience tells one that it is right."* We must fight until we win.

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