Proposal: NCBW NJ Voting Rights Advocacy Position for Advocacy Day

Purpose

In light of the recent gutting of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this proposal recommends that NCBW NJ present a clear voting rights advocacy position during Advocacy Day on May 18, 2026, at the New Jersey State House in Trenton. While S3925 raises important concerns regarding identification, citizenship status, and voting access in New Jersey, the federal SAVE Act and recent redistricting actions in southern states present a broader and more urgent threat to voting rights, ballot access, and fair representation.

The purpose of our presence at the State House should be to ask New Jersey legislators where they stand on protecting voting rights at both the state and federal levels, including redistricting, voter access, and the advancement of the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey.

Background and Context

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was created to protect voters from racial discrimination in voting practices. However, over the last decade, federal voting rights protections have been significantly weakened, beginning with the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, which removed the federal preclearance formula that required certain jurisdictions with histories of discrimination to obtain federal approval before changing voting laws. More recent legal developments have further narrowed protections under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, particularly as it relates to redistricting and minority voter representation. Recent reporting describes the April 2026 Louisiana redistricting decision as a major weakening of Section 2 protections, especially for challenges to maps that dilute minority voting strength. (Reuters)

At the same time, the SAVE Act would create new federal requirements for documentary proof of citizenship before voter registration. Advocacy and voting-rights organizations have warned that such requirements could create barriers for eligible voters who do not have ready access to passports, birth certificates, or other citizenship documents. The Brennan Center states that more than 21 million American citizens may not have easy access to these documents. (Brennan Center for Justice)

This is why the SAVE Act far exceeds S3925 in scope. S3925 is a New Jersey bill focused on non-citizen identification cards and voter identification requirements. Its stated summary requires driver's licenses and identification cards issued to non-citizens to bear a distinct color and include language that the document cannot be used to vote; it also includes voter identification requirements. (LegiScan) The SAVE Act, by contrast, is federal and would alter the voter registration process nationally.

Why This Matters Now

The urgency is not theoretical. In the wake of recent federal voting rights decisions, states are already taking action that could affect Black voter representation.

In Louisiana, after the Supreme Court decision involving the state's congressional map, Governor Jeff Landry issued an executive order suspending the state's congressional primaries while lawmakers work on new districts. Reporting notes that the ruling invalidated a majority-Black congressional district and created immediate disruption to the election calendar. (AP News)

In Alabama, state leaders are seeking to revisit congressional maps after prior litigation required the state to use a map that provided Black voters with two opportunity districts. Civil rights organizations note that Alabama's earlier congressional maps were found to dilute Black voting power under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. (American Civil Liberties Union) Recent reporting indicates Alabama officials are now exploring ways to redraw maps following the Louisiana decision. (Reuters)

In Tennessee, lawmakers are considering redrawing the state's congressional map, including changes that could affect Memphis and the state's only Democratic-held congressional district. Reports indicate Tennessee leaders are pursuing a special session and considering redistricting changes following the Supreme Court ruling. (Axios)

Together, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee demonstrate that the weakening of federal voting rights protections can quickly lead to redistricting efforts that may reduce minority voting power and limit fair representation.

New Jersey's Responsibility and Opportunity

New Jersey has an opportunity to take a proactive position. The New Jersey Assembly passed the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey in March 2026 by a vote of 53–20, and voting-rights advocates are now calling for the Senate to act. (New Jersey Institute for Social Justice)

The bill would establish state-level voting rights protections, including safeguards against discriminatory voting changes, expanded language access, assistance at the polls, and protections against voter discrimination and intimidation. (New Jersey Institute for Social Justice)

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice has stated that the bill would incorporate current federal voting rights protections into state law and help prevent discriminatory voting changes in certain jurisdictions through preclearance-style protections. (New Jersey Institute for Social Justice)

This makes Advocacy Day timely and important. NCBW NJ can use its presence at the State House to ask direct, substantive questions and to make clear that voting rights, fair representation, and ballot access are public policy priorities for Black women, families, and communities.

Recommended Advocacy Position

NCBW NJ should present the position that voting rights protections must be strengthened, not weakened, at both the state and federal levels. *The chapter should acknowledge concerns raised by S3925 but emphasize that the SAVE Act and redistricting developments in Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee reveal a much broader threat to ballot access and fair representation*.

Our advocacy position should be:

NCBW NJ supports policies that protect eligible voters, preserve fair representation, prevent racial vote dilution, and ensure that Black women and communities of color are not disproportionately burdened by new voting restrictions or redistricting decisions.

Key Questions for Legislators on Advocacy Day

When meeting with legislators or representatives on May 18, NCBW NJ should ask:

1. **What is New Jersey's official position on federal efforts that may roll back voting rights protections, including the SAVE Act?**
2. **How will New Jersey protect eligible voters from unnecessary barriers to voter registration and ballot access?**
3. **What is the State's position on redistricting and fair representation, especially in light of actions being taken in Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee?**
4. **Will the New Jersey Senate advance and support the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey?**
5. **How are New Jersey's federal representatives voting or publicly positioning themselves on the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act at the federal level?**
6. **What safeguards exist in New Jersey to prevent racial vote dilution, voter intimidation, and discriminatory voting changes?**

Proposed Advocacy Message

NCBW NJ should communicate that voting rights are not only a federal issue; they are a state responsibility. As federal protections are narrowed, states must decide whether they will fill the gap or allow communities to become vulnerable to discriminatory barriers.

New Jersey has the opportunity to lead by advancing the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act and by clearly opposing federal and state-level efforts that make it harder for eligible voters to register, vote, and be fairly represented.

Recommended Action

It is recommended that NCBW NJ use Advocacy Day on May 18, 2026, to:

1. Present a clear chapter position on voting rights protection.
2. Ask legislators about their position on the SAVE Act and federal voting rights rollbacks.
3. Request Senate movement on the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey.
4. Ask how New Jersey will respond to redistricting threats and racial vote dilution.
5. Encourage continued voter education and community awareness through NCBW NJ's public policy platform.

Closing Statement

The current voting rights landscape requires vigilance, clarity, and action. What is happening in Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee demonstrates how quickly weakened federal protections can affect representation. New Jersey must not wait until voting rights are further compromised.

NCBW NJ's presence at the State House on May 18 is an opportunity to speak with purpose, ask direct questions, and advocate for protections that ensure every eligible voter has access to the ballot and every community has fair representation.

This is not only a legislative issue. It is a civil rights issue, a community issue, and a Black women's advocacy issue.