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TRENTON – Governor Mikie Sherrill today hosted a celebration of the enactment of the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act, landmark legislation she signed into law earlier this month that strengthens voting rights amidst federal threats.

Governor Sherrill signed the legislation into law on July 2, 2026, making New Jersey the first state in the nation to enact comprehensive statewide voting rights protections following the Supreme Court's decision in *Louisiana v. Callais*, which effectively dismantled Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act. At a time when the federal government is making every effort to make it harder for eligible Americans to ca ballot, New Jersey is choosing a different path—protecting every eligible voter’s fundamental right to participate freely, fairly, and securely while safeguarding the integrity of our elections.

“I was honored to call John Lewis a friend and to serve alongside him in Congress. There is no better way to honor his legacy than by putting his life’s work into law,” **said Governor Sherrill**. “The John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act strengthens voting rights, expands access to the ballot, and ensures every eligible New Jerseyan has a fair opportunity to participate in our democracy. At a time when those rights are under attack by Donald Trump and Republicans in Washington, this work is more important than ever.”

“Every New Jersey voter deserves the freedom to make their voice heard without barriers, intimidation, or discrimination,” **said Lieutenant Governor Caldwell**. “The John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act honors the legacy of a civil rights icon by strengthening voter protections and ensuring the voting process works for every community across our state.”

The John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act strengthens New Jersey’s elections by:

- Establishing state preclearance, requiring jurisdictions with a history of discrimination to receive approval from the Attorney General before making changes to election administration.
- Prohibiting vote dilution by ensuring politicians cannot draw legislative districts that silence communities of color.
- Banning voter intimidation and deceptive practices, including providing false information about voting eligibility, polling locations, or election day.
- Authorizing the Attorney General and private plaintiffs to bring actions in state court to protect voting rights.
- Expanding language assistance, so eligible voters aren’t shut out because they speak another language.
- Creating a public statewide elections database, so voters and advocates can monitor election data.

“Throughout the last several election cycles, we have seen voting rights come under attack across the country in ways that have raised serious concerns about access to our democratic process,” **said Senate President Pro Tempore Shirley K. Turner (D-Mercer, Hunterdon)**, the prime Senate sponsor. “At a time when proposals continue to advance nationally that could make it harder for eligible citizens to vote, especially for women and communities of color, this law reaffirms New Jersey’s commitment to protecting and strengthening access to the ballot box for every eligible voter.”

“I am truly honored to celebrate Governor Sherrill’s recent signing of this vital piece of legislation. It’s time for states to step up to protect voting rights. New Jersey now has a clear mandate to not only protect but expand voting rights for Black voters and other voters of color who are disproportionately harmed by discriminatory practices and barriers to voting,” **said Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson (D-Hunterdon, Mercer)**. “With the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act now law, New Jersey has joined the growing movement of state voting rights acts. We are now the 10th state to pass a state VRA and—because we’re New Jersey and we don’t play—ours is one of the strongest in the country. By passing our own voting rights, we are making sure that New Jersey voters—especially Black and other voters of color—are protected more by our state law than by federal law.”

“Thirteen years ago, the United States Supreme Court tore the heart of the federal Voting Rights Act. A few months ago, it finished the job. But New Jersey did not sit idle,” **said Ryan Haygood, who served as President & CEO of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice for over eleven**



years. “The Institute and over 60 organizations working on behalf of New Jersey’s communities of color – those most at risk of being disenfranchised – worked for the last four years to make sure New Jersey voters are protected. Now, with the passing and signing of one of the strongest state voting rights laws in the country, we have achieved that goal – and set an example for all of America. We are deeply grateful to Asw. Reynolds-Jackson for her stalwart leadership, and to Gov. Sherrill for signing the bill and holding this meaningful ceremony to mark its importance.”

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