



2023 CONSERVATION VOTERS MOVEMENT STATE DEMOCRACY REPORT



OUR STATE DEMOCRACY WORK

LETTER FROM THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF STATE CAPACITY BUILDING

In the wake of an era defined by rapid changes and historic challenges, the imperative of strengthening our nation's democracy has risen to a central tenet for the **League of Conservation Voters (LCV)** and affiliated 33 state organizations, collectively known as the **Conservation Voters Movement (CVM)**. Our nation's democratic institutions and processes are under attack by corporate and polluting interests that benefit from the suppression of voting rights and the weakening of our voting systems. The collective goal of our State Democracy Program is to protect and strengthen our country's democratic institutions, promote civic engagement, and fight for a just and equitable society.

For the CVM, safeguarding our democracy and increasing civic engagement is not an optional strategy; it is an essential element of our mission. **Without a strong U.S. democracy, we cannot succeed in our overarching mission to protect the environmental well-being of our communities.**

**Democracy and environmental priorities are intertwined,
and one cannot thrive without the other.**

Moreover, the creation of a truly inclusive democracy that answers the needs of all communities must reflect the diversity of the United States. Regardless of a person's background, socioeconomic status, or the color of their skin, everyone should have an equitable stake in the democratic process. Thus, our vision for representative democracy requires the enactment of bold, comprehensive democratic reforms that ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

In the following report, we highlight our efforts in five program areas, spotlighting the critical milestones achieved in 2023 and the strategies we used to secure progress.

Sincerely,

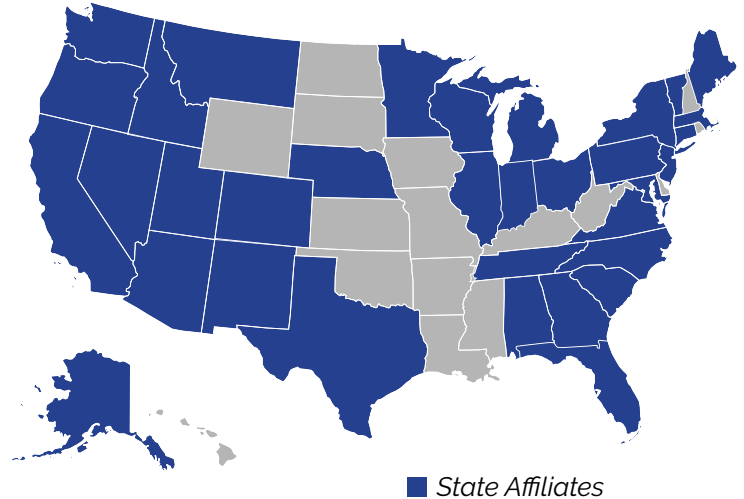


A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hope Rippeon'.

Hope Rippeon,
LCV Senior Vice President of State Capacity Building

THE CONSERVATION VOTERS MOVEMENT'S PUSH FOR DEMOCRACY

The Conservation Voters Movement (CVM) is a partnership between the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) and 33 state-affiliated organizations. The CVM consists of a diverse and dedicated group of individuals working together to ensure that our democracy is inclusive, vibrant, and representative of all people in this country. By fostering collaboration across our network, the CVM ensures that every state can lean on both LCV's national success and the achievements of other states in the journey toward a stronger democracy.



OUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

As our work has expanded in both size and scope, the CVM now boasts a team of staff across the country who play pivotal roles in coalitions and campaigns related to voting rights, election protection, and democracy.

In 2023, the CVM made significant contributions to the fight for a stronger democracy, including:

- ✓ Securing automatic voter registration in Pennsylvania
- ✓ Protecting voters' choices in Ohio
- ✓ Passing the Connecticut Voting Rights Act
- ✓ Retaining administrative authority in the Wisconsin Election Commission

The 33 CVM state affiliates exert political influence at the state level, where crucial decisions regarding voting rights, redistricting, and electoral reforms are made. Their deep understanding of local politics allows them to shape political discourse and legislative processes. State affiliates excel in forging coalitions with other advocacy groups and like-minded stakeholders. By unifying diverse voices, they create a formidable political force that can advocate for collective pro-voter agendas. CVM organizations are key players in state legislative processes, working to draft, support, or oppose bills that impact voting rights and electoral systems.

AN INCLUSIVE GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT THAT COUNTERS CORPORATE INFLUENCE

To prevent the undue influence of corporate interests in our political system, the CVM works to ensure that the voices of everyday people are not drowned out by money and power. We mobilize marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other communities of color who have been systematically excluded from the political process since the nation's inception. Our democracy must provide equitable access to government and decision-making processes for all.

BY THE NUMBERS: 2023 STATE DEMOCRACY WINS

152 TOTAL WINS

 **54**

PRO-VOTER POLICIES
ADVANCED

 **84**

ANTI-VOTER POLICIES
BLOCKED

 **14**

POWER BUILDING
VICTORIES



31 OF THESE WINS RELATED TO
VOTE-BY-MAIL



55 PETITIONS AND DIGITAL ACTIONS
FROM CVM STATES



18,365 ACTIONS TAKEN
BY INDIVIDUALS NATIONWIDE



65 MEDIA MENTIONS
ABOUT OUR COLLECTIVE DEMOCRACY WORK

OUR PROGRAM AREAS

Our State Democracy Program spans five distinct areas, each serving as a vital component of our overall mission:



PROTECT VOTERS

Protecting the essential democratic processes that allow people to express their will at the ballot box.



DEFEND THE FREEDOM TO VOTE

Ensuring that voters are safeguarded from suppression tactics.



EXPAND THE ELECTORATE

Advocating for policies that broaden the voter base and increase civic participation.



SECURE NATIONAL STANDARDS

Working toward a set of national standards that guarantee the integrity of our elections.



DIVERSIFY REPRESENTATION

Striving to create a political landscape that reflects the rich diversity of the United States.

As the CVM pursues reforms in each of these program areas, our movement creates a groundswell of support for pro-voter reforms across the country and at the federal level. This journey begins with the power of the collective, where each state is both a unique opportunity to protect voters in that state and a testing ground for championing and enacting pro-voter reforms.

The CVM has already proven the effectiveness of this state-to-federal strategy in the policy area of clean energy, where we have made great strides towards the goal of shifting the U.S. to an equitable clean energy future through our successful **Clean Energy for All campaign**. This CVM-wide campaign has helped secure commitments to 100% clean energy policies in 15 states and counting. This work led to the enactment of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) — the most significant federal clean energy legislation in U.S. history. Our network is now using the same state-to-federal model to champion and advance policies that strengthen our democracy.

PROTECT VOTERS

The federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) is a landmark piece of legislation enacted in 1965 to combat racial discrimination in voting. The 2013 U.S. Supreme Court case *Shelby County v. Holder* gutted a key provision of the VRA, allowing states with histories of voter suppression to implement voting changes without federal approval. Before the decision, the turnout gap between White and Black voters had been narrowing, and even briefly closed in a few states. **However, since the *Shelby County* decision, this trend towards true equity has completely reversed and is continuing to widen.**

The clear path forward for true voter protection involves building a foundation for passing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (JLVRAA) at the federal level by enacting state-level VRAs to counter contemporary forms of voting discrimination. In 2023, the CVM created a groundswell of support at the state level to reinstate voter protections stripped by decades of conservative court packing in the Supreme Court.

While federal progress on the JLVRAA is stalled by Republican obstructionists in Congress, states are enshrining critical legal protections for voters by enacting State Voting Rights Acts. These state acts serve as a safeguard for voting rights in the face of the current conservative Supreme Court and congressional gridlock. State VRAs implement crucial measures, such as preclearance, language access, and legal protections—all vital reforms for safeguarding the rights of voters of color.

CONNECTICUT

Passing the Connecticut Voting Rights Act



The Connecticut League of Conservation Voters (CTLCV) championed the Connecticut Voting Rights Act (CTVRA), which successfully passed in June 2023. Prior to the bill's passage, Connecticut lacked comprehensive voter protection laws. The CTVRA creates avenues for voters to fight against discriminatory practices at the ballot box, launches a preclearance program modeled on the federal VRA by requiring local governments to prove that election changes do not harm voters of color, and expands language assistance for voters who speak a language other than English.



CTLCV leveraged its position as a well-established political organization with deep ties to the environmental movement to advocate for this legislation.

One key policy expansion that the CTVRA brings beyond the 1965 federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) is limiting voter intimidation, deception, and obstruction, allowing victims of voter intimidation to take legal action. **Because of CTLCV's commitment to fight for democracy, this act is now the most expansive State VRA in the nation.**

CTLCV's work on the ground was pivotal in passing the CTVRA. CTLCV provided essential training to community leaders on how to lobby in support of voting rights and mobilized more than 30 voters to lobby their representatives at the state capitol during a lobby day push. CTLCV also organized virtual town halls that emphasized the importance of language expansion for Connecticut's Latinx communities.

As part of a small and mighty five-person team at CTLCV, Climate Policy and Outreach Coordinator Julianna Larue was on the ground for this battle, training volunteers and working directly with lawmakers to get the CTVRA passed. As a young person, Julianna believes her peers belong in the democracy space to protect their futures, and that by ensuring college and high school students are registered and active voters, young Connecticuters will have their voices heard and their planet protected.

“Lawmakers view CTLCV as a legitimate source for policy positions. Seeing a massive environmental group stand up for a democracy bill made many Connecticut legislators pay attention and support the bill.”

– JULIANNA LARUE, CTLCV Climate Policy and Outreach Coordinator

MICHIGAN

Riding the Wave of Prop 2 to Expand Voting Rights

After helping to pass the landmark ballot measure Prop 2 in 2022, the Michigan League of Conservation Voters (MLCV) worked to ensure its equitable implementation in 2023, while setting its sights on the next big reform: a Michigan Voting Rights Act.

In April 2023, staff with MLCV's Democracy for All program were invited to present to the House Elections Committee on their mission and democracy policy priorities. This proactive move established MLCV as not just a conservation organization, but a powerhouse in the Michigan voting rights landscape.

The MLCV government affairs team kept MLCV's voting rights work at the top of legislators' minds and priority list by engaging with legislators who were well aligned in the environmental space but new to being lobbied on voting rights issues. MLCV simultaneously educated lawmakers on MLCV's work to elect energy champions and to support reforms that ensure that the avenue to elect them is free, fair, and equitable. The Michigan VRA will be taken up again in 2024.

NEW YORK

Great Strides in an Inaugural Year

In 2023, New York League of Conservation Voters (**NYLCV**) embarked on its first year dedicated to advancing pro-democracy policies. In a short span, NYLCV made notable strides through strategic partnerships and influential collaborations. The New York legislature passed a State Voting Rights Act (**VRA**) in 2022, but an essential provision was missing from the law: a central hub for election data and demographic information that empowers officials and community members to ensure equitable elections.

NYLCV worked with state partners to lobby for the database, reaching legislators not traditionally within the orbit of democracy organizations, and connecting representatives with communities of color and rural constituents where NYLCV's environmental connections are strong.

“On day one, we added value to the coalition. We had membership and connection to diverse New Yorkers and communities of color. And our work on energy added a new set of relationships to the mix.”

– NIA RHODES, former NYLCV Vice President of Programs

While the database provision must still be passed through the budget in 2024, NYLCV took the opportunity throughout the 2023 session to foster relationships with legislators at the forefront of championing voting rights bills and to solidify its reputation as a democracy leader.

NEW JERSEY

Advancing the NJVRA with Precision and Persistence

At the forefront of voter protection efforts, the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters (**New Jersey LCV**) plays a vital role on the steering committee for the state's voting rights coalition, guiding its policy priorities in collaboration with partners.

In 2023, New Jersey was part of the contingent of states considering passage of a State VRA through the New Jersey Voting Rights Act (**NJVRA**). While significant progress on the NJVRA was made, there are still some crucial amendments that the coalition is keen on incorporating into the bill. New Jersey LCV has been an active and committed partner in guiding the coalition to strategically advance the legislation, using savvy lobbying to seize opportune moments to ensure that critical changes are received favorably. Without the backend efforts by New Jersey LCV to set up meetings with key legislators, negotiations could not take place regarding the inclusion of provisions like language access and determining the entity responsible for overseeing preclearance.

New Jersey LCV examined the campaign timeline and strategized with key partners to plan for swift passage of the NJVRA in 2024. New Jersey LCV's precise and deliberative approach ensured that a future NJVRA will maximize protections for all New Jerseyans.

DEFEND THE FREEDOM TO VOTE

The right to vote and our democratic institutions are under assault — and the most critical of these battles occur in state legislative bodies. **In 2023 alone, over 400 restrictive voting bills were proposed in 47 state legislatures.** In the face of these rising attacks on our democratic freedoms, the CVM has been resolute in defending the principles that are the bedrock of a healthy democracy via a range of initiatives.

OHIO

Ohioans Unite to Preserve Citizen-Led Ballot Initiatives



Citizen-led ballot initiatives allow constituents to make policy to address critical issues that impact their daily lives. Twenty-six states allow citizen-led ballot initiatives, but in 2023, far-right state legislators in Ohio tried to radically dismantle this important tool of democracy. Rising to the challenge, the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund (**OEC Action Fund**) defeated this attack both at the legislature and then again on the ballot.

The first attacks on ballot initiatives began in November 2022 with HJR 6, a proposed constitutional amendment to increase the threshold to pass ballot measures from 50% to 60%. OEC Action Fund organized hundreds of Ohioans to turn out in opposition, and they were able to block HJR 6 during the lame duck session.

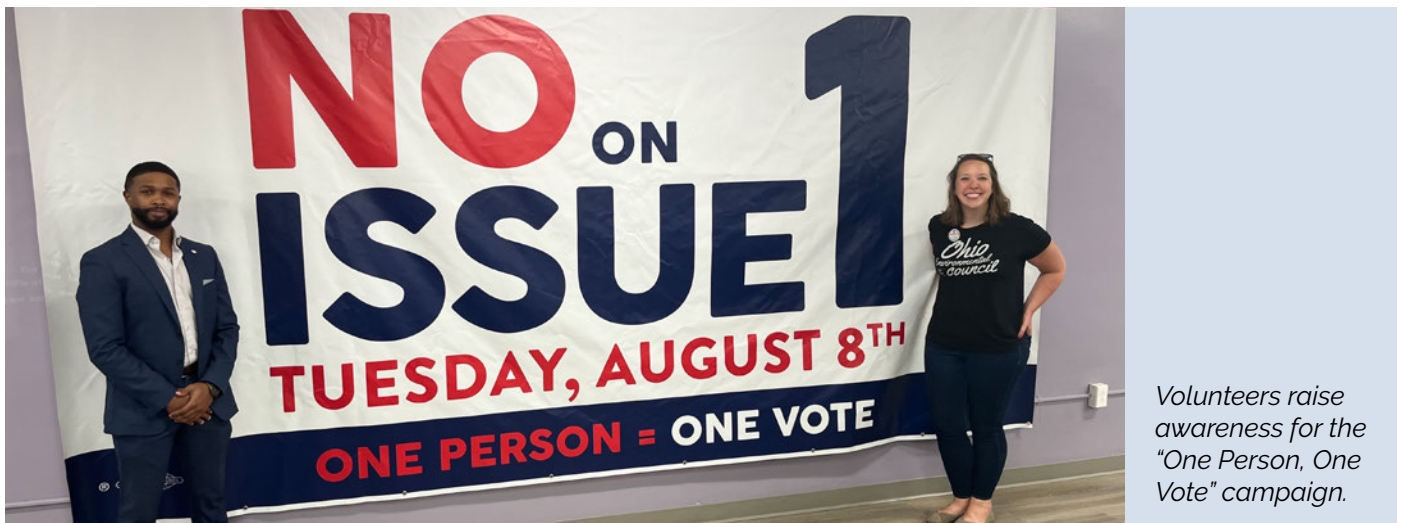
Grassroots opponents of anti-voter legislation gather in the Capitol in Akron.



But the legislative fight was only beginning. As the capitol reopened for the 2023 session, HJR 6 was reintroduced as HJR 1 and SJR 2, with the same attack of raising the passage threshold. But this new version went further, adding barriers to the signature collection process that would have made citizen-initiated constitutional amendments functionally impossible. OEC Action Fund coordinated with their partners to collect testimony and host another rally, keeping HJR 1 from passing in time to go to the ballot in a low-turnout May election.

The defeat of HJR 1 in early spring allowed time for a coalition of organizations, including OEC Action Fund, to gather resources and create a rapid response plan of action to immediately mobilize against this far-right-backed ballot initiative to dismantle ballot initiatives. While HJR1 was defeated, the legislature then turned its attention to moving SJR 2, the Senate companion. As expected, the supermajority Republican legislature passed the bill in an incredibly close vote — with three Republicans opposed — that created the Issue 1 ballot measure.

In direct contradiction to a law passed only a few months earlier that made August special elections illegal, the Ohio General Assembly put Issue 1 on the ballot on an August special election date. Right-wing extremists intended to use the historically low turnout in August special elections to pass the measure and suppress voters, but they didn't anticipate the massive coalition effort already underway by OEC Action Fund and others in opposition. Moments after this resolution passed, OEC Action Fund and the coalition launched the **One Person, One Vote** campaign.



Volunteers raise awareness for the "One Person, One Vote" campaign.

To reach millions of registered voters in Ohio, OEC Action Fund and the One Person One Vote campaign undertook a massive get-out-the-vote campaign. They ran radio ads in Central Ohio reaching over 1.6 million people, recruited dozens of volunteers for relational organizing strategies, and engaged millions of voters through digital ads. Predicted turnout for an August election was 8%, but **with the efforts of OEC Action Fund and the One Person One Vote campaign, 37% of Ohioans turned out.** Despite far-right efforts to seed disinformation, Ohioans voted against Issue 1 by a massive 16-point margin.

"Everyone believes in the concept of freedom and the importance of protecting it. Both conservative and progressive voters support free and open elections. August 8th was just the tipping point in protecting these initiatives."

– CHRIS TAVENOR, Managing Director of Democracy Policy

The November 2023 election demonstrated just how essential this work was when Ohioans voted to enshrine abortion access into the constitution with **56%** of the vote, preserving this essential health care option for millions of people. Going forward, environmental protections, redistricting reform, and ranked choice voting could be decided through citizen-ballot initiatives. Ohio's win could mark the beginning of a wave of pro-democracy reforms across the state.

IDAHO

Beating Back Attacks on Ballot Initiatives

In a legislative session rife with challenges to voter rights, Conservation Voters for Idaho (CVI) stood firm in its commitment to preserving the democratic foundations of the state. CVI's advocacy efforts effectively thwarted several bills and initiatives that threatened to limit the freedom to vote and hinder the ballot initiative process.

One of the key victories in 2023 was defeating a constitutional amendment that would have made Idaho's ballot initiative process the strictest in the nation. The proposed changes were significant and would have made initiatives a right in name only — despite the Idaho Supreme Court ruling a similar bill unconstitutional in 2021.

CVI led a coalition of partners to defeat the bill, attributing their success to the strong relationships built with the Republican secretary of state and bipartisan lawmakers. CVI's organizing efforts, including a door-to-door canvass, led to thousands of emails and calls into the statehouse.

In a key strategic maneuver, CVI helped flip one Republican senator's vote. CVI learned the senator had not heard his constituents' position on the matter and organized a team of Idahoans, including the senator's neighbors, to express their support for the ballot initiative process.

Despite the constitutional amendment being a priority for House leadership, CVI defeated the legislation handily in March by securing necessary votes to ensure it failed. And their successes didn't end there, as they continued to defeat a slew of anti-democracy bills on the House floor, including bills to:

- ✘ Prevent counties from sending absentee applications to voters.
- ✘ Add barriers to becoming a ballot measure signature gatherer.
- ✘ Limit no-excuse vote-by-mail to only a small percentage of Idahoans meeting stringent requirements.
- ✘ Eliminate registered voters' ability to sign an affidavit to verify their identity and vote in Idaho elections.

CALIFORNIA

Shielding Voters from Big Oil's Deceptive Referendum Tactics

In 2023, California Environmental Voters (**EnviroVoters**) successfully advocated for the passage of AB 421, which regulates the language of referendums and provides voters with more comprehensive information about the initiatives they are voting on.



Throughout the session, EnviroVoters held numerous strategic meetings with legislators and supported a rally for referendum reform in May.

EnviroVoters worked with key figures like the governor, House speaker, and Senate pro tempore to prioritize the most important provisions of the reform: ballot language regulation. As the legislation moved through the House and into the Senate, EnviroVoters played a crucial role in securing the support of the secretary of state and Senate majority leader. In the process of making compromises to secure a victory, EnviroVoters ensured swift passage and immediate effect for upcoming elections by invoking an urgency clause and then securing the necessary two-thirds vote to shield the law from potential referendum challenges.

AB 421's language clarity reform will have a significant impact in helping voters understand the referendums they are voting on. For example, Big Oil has qualified a referendum for the November 2024 ballot to repeal a law passed to end drilling within just over half a mile of schools, businesses, and residences. **Thanks to EnviroVoters' successful efforts to pass AB421, voters will encounter clear referendum language that will make it easier for them to protect their communities.**

ARIZONA

Defeating Every Anti-Voter Bill

Chispa Arizona (**Chispa AZ**) — a program of LCV that organizes within Latinx communities to grow political power and civic engagement — approached the 2023 legislative session with hope for a new direction thanks to new, pro-democracy leadership in the governor's mansion. **That hope was well placed after their efforts, including a letter to the governor, resulted in the defeat or veto of every anti-voter bill on Chispa AZ's priority list.**

Chispa AZ effectively battled a slew of restrictive voting measures in the state, including systemic and racist voter ID legislation and legislation to limit the ability of voters to pass ballot initiatives. Chispa AZ's collaborative efforts with local community groups and lawmakers were essential in safeguarding voting rights, including successfully killing a bill to raise the threshold to approve ballot initiatives for constitutional amendments from 50% to 60%, which would have made these measures nearly impossible to pass.

Despite encountering bullying, hostility, and outright intimidation when showing up at the Capitol, Chispa AZ stayed at the forefront of efforts to defeat this bill, using tactics such as generating sign-on letters, participating in coalition press releases, organizing rallies, and delivering petitions. A successful lobby day in February was followed by a powerful letter in March to the Joint House and Senate Elections Committee, urging a commitment to ensure that every eligible voter, regardless of their zip code, race, or income, can exercise their right to vote.

Chispa AZ's engagement in democracy advocacy extends to the executive branch, as well. Governor Katie Hobbs has played a pivotal role in preventing democratic backsliding, with Chispa AZ and the state's voting rights coalition providing vital support. Chispa AZ joined partners in sending a letter to the governor outlining priority bills to veto. Of the original list of 33 bills, eight bills failed to pass the legislature, and Governor Hobbs vetoed ALL of the remaining 25, marking **an incredible 100% success rate for Chispa AZ's defensive work.**

Chispa AZ and youth leaders from its Plantando Semillas program met with Gov. Hobbs to discuss key initiatives and thank her for supporting voting rights.



With the support of Chispa AZ and partners, Gov. Hobbs was able to wield her veto power to protect democratic freedoms in a state where many have succumbed to election-denying conspiracies. Chispa AZ's consistent efforts to engage with partners and work with elected officials are vital to Arizona's democratic future.

ALASKA

Transforming Bills from Suppression to Inclusion

Targeted rollbacks of progressive reforms were the hallmark of the 2023 Alaska session. The Alaska Center (AKC) worked with legislators across party lines to compromise on bills that improve the overall voter experience for all Alaskans. One such bill, SB 138, began as a far-reaching bill with several harmful provisions, including purging Alaska's voter rolls every two years. On top of the same harmful provisions, the House companion, HB 129, also included a measure that would repeal automatic voter registration.

Knowing that HB 129 was the worse bill, AKC worked to improve SB 138 and ensure the failure of HB 129. AKC collaborated with coalition partners to carefully analyze the bills and voice concerns to senators, successfully negotiating protections for automatic voter registration by guaranteeing the defeat of HB 129, and adding pro-voter measures to SB 138.

By the end of 2023, SB 138 evolved into a bill with same-day registration, ballot tracking and curing, improvements to mail-in ballot requirements, a permanent mail-in voter list, language access requirements, and more. With AKC's tactful negotiations and investments in relationship building, it passed the Senate State Affairs committee and will be taken up for passage on the floor in 2024.

FLORIDA

Empowering Voters through Outreach & Education

Florida Conservation Voters (FCV) has long worked to mitigate the problematic political agenda of far-right legislators and leadership, including working to protect our environment and healthy communities for everyone.. FCV's Democracy for All program specifically addresses the ongoing defensive battles around voting rights in the legislature and beyond.

FCV joined partners for a lobby day at the state capitol in March, organizing against several bills designed to suppress the will of Florida voters, including a proposal to raise the threshold of votes to amend the state constitution. FCV brought community members from South Florida for a lobby day to share their concerns with lawmakers on key issues. Participants engaged directly with legislators, spoke at committee meetings, and learned about priority bills from partners. FCV opposition efforts successfully prevented the passage of both the threshold bill and a bill that would have banned nonpartisan municipal races.



In March, Florida Conservation Voters and partners spoke about voter suppression during a lobby day at the state capitol in Tallahassee.

VIRGINIA

Preserving Recent Voting Rights Gains

In 2023, Virginia League of Conservation Voters (**VALCV**) ensured that not a single voter suppression bill — of the half dozen passed out of the state House — made it to the governor's desk. These bills targeted pro-voter reforms passed before Governor Youngkin assumed office, including same-day registration (SDR), vote-by-mail (VBM), and automatic voter registration. For example:

- ✘ **SB 884:** A voter suppression bill that would have repealed same-day registration and early voting, required an excuse to vote absentee, required ID for in-person voting and vote-by-mail, removed affidavit option for voter ID, limited who can return a VBM ballot and required receipt by Election Day, eliminated the use of electronic poll books and voting machines, and required manual tabulation of ballots.
- ✘ **HB 2234:** A bill that would have restricted the use of SDR to only military members and their families. This drastic curtailment of access to voting registration would have limited the ability of those who have moved, or became eligible to vote recently, to register to vote, adding an unnecessary hurdle to the voting process with no demonstrable increase in election security.

Because of VALCV's pioneering clean energy work, they have strong relationships with legislators, including the chair of the energy subcommittee, who also leads the elections committee. VALCV used their strong relationship as an opportunity to educate and support the senator's leadership, providing backup when anti-voter measures made it to the committee.

NEBRASKA

Equitable Implementation

After Nebraskans voted in favor of creating voter ID requirements in 2022 through a Republican-led ballot measure, Nebraska Conservation Voters (**NCV**) used robust engagement and negotiation to ensure the most equitable and accessible implementation possible of the required new law. NCV drove compromise on a bill that included the most expansive list of acceptable IDs, the least restrictive requirements, and the most permissible allowance for voters who show up without an ID. NCV supported a bipartisan compromise bill as the best possible option — and the ultimate winner — among many competing bills in 2023.

NCV also helped prevent harmful elements from competing voter ID bills — including elimination of vote-by-mail — from being included in the bill. NCV engaged constituents to create a steady stream of comments directed at targeted senators. NCV provided lawmakers with an expansive list of IDs, which led to the inclusion of student IDs, military IDs, and tribal IDs as acceptable forms of voter identification. Compared to other states with strict photo-ID laws, Nebraska allows for a more diverse array of citizens to more easily exercise their right to vote.

As a result of NCV and partners' work, the state has planned steps to provide free IDs to its citizens, removing financial barriers that could disenfranchise voters. NCV also educated lawmakers about the importance of allowing provisional voting for individuals without proper identification on Election Day, which would safeguard voters in cases where they might not have immediate access to their IDs.

GEORGIA

Session Highs and Lows

In 2023, Georgia Conservation Voters (**GCV**) ramped up efforts to tackle voting rights and democracy legislation. GCV entered the democracy space by directly lobbying on voting rights issues and activating their supporters on rapid response bills throughout the legislative session.

While Georgia's legislative session is only 40 days long each year, GCV still made a big impact in the policy world. **GCV worked with partners to support the passage of a bill requiring two hours off work to vote during early voting, one of the few bipartisan bills to pass the 2023 session**, which will allow more people to make it to the polls during early voting. GCV and partners were also able to fend off SB 221, this session's omnibus elections bill, which aimed to significantly expand mass voter challenges, ban the use of drop boxes in the state, and impose multiple unfunded mandates on county elections offices.



Georgia Conservation Voter Senior Organizer Mia Delamar discusses critical voting rights protections with state leaders at the capitol in Atlanta.

While Georgia saw many defensive wins this session, the passage of an anti-voter bill two nights before the end of session caught many people off guard. The bill bans private funding for elections and makes it a felony for county workers to accept any outside funding to supplement the high cost of running elections. GCV and partner organizations fought hard to oppose this bill by attending hearings, sending action alerts to Georgians, and making calls to the governor, but the bill was passed in the middle of the night after opposition groups, including GCV, had left the building, and later signed into law by Governor Brian Kemp.

DEFENDING AND MITIGATING VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS

Voter ID laws have emerged as a contentious and polarizing issue in many states, raising significant concerns about their disproportionate impact on historically excluded communities. The adoption of voter ID requirements leads to reduced voter turnout and inequitable representation among these communities. In 2023, several CVM states worked to defend against the adoption of voter ID laws and mitigate the damage when implementation was required:

- **Pennsylvania (No ID):** Pennsylvania has seen attempts to pass restrictive voter ID law during nearly every legislative session in recent memory. Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania (CVPA) has been at the forefront of efforts to resist these provisions and protect the rights of voters in the state. In 2023, CVPA used savvy legislative maneuvering to remove voter ID provisions from both the budget and a constitutional amendment bill.
- **New Mexico (No ID):** Conservation Voters New Mexico successfully fought against racist legislation including a voter ID bill that would have omitted tribal IDs as acceptable voter ID for the state's large Native population.
- **Maine (No ID):** Maine Conservation Voters successfully co-led partners in the Mainers for Modern Elections coalition to defeat two bills that would have required IDs for the first time in Maine's history.
- **Virginia (Non-Strict Non-Photo):** An introduced bill would have eliminated affidavits for voters without ID and transformed the state into a strict ID state. The Virginia League of Conservation Voters and pro-democracy allies in the Senate defeated the bill, while simultaneously supporting a bill that improved the identification process for mail-in ballots.
- **Idaho (Non-Strict Photo):** Conservation Voters Idaho (CVI) fought against several different voter ID bills, with the most critical being a proposal to eliminate the affidavit process for voters who don't have IDs. Working with the secretary of state, CVI successfully worked to preserve the affidavit option.
- **Arizona (Strict Non-Photo):** Chispa Arizona successfully defended against four bills that would have added severe ID restrictions for voting by mail.
- **Ohio (Strict Photo):** Ohio faced the unfortunate passage of strict photo ID during the lame duck session, when a supermajority swiftly advanced anti-voter legislation under the guise of election security. OEC focused its attention on voter education about the new requirements.

MONTANA

Pushing Back Against Targeted Attacks on Democracy

Montana Conservation Voters (**MCV**) mobilized against attacks on democracy throughout the 2023 legislative session, defending against attempts to shape the outcomes of future elections and silence everyday Montanans. Going into the session, extremists pledged to go after democratic policies enshrined in Montana's Constitution. MCV organized against these efforts by lobbying moderate Republicans, sending out action alerts to members, organizing rallies, and fielding paid phone calls.

MCV defeated many attempts during the legislative session to undermine the foundation of the state's democracy, including its courts and constitution. **MCV successfully thwarted all bills that sought to introduce partisanship into elections**, including a bill to allow judges to run as partisans and a bill that required Supreme Court justices to declare their political affiliation. MCV was instrumental in encouraging Montanans to voice their opposition to a bill aimed at converting all nonpartisan races into partisan contests.

MCV co-hosted a rally and lobby days at the Capitol to educate Montanans about their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment. MCV produced [an educational video](#) to promote the Montana Constitution and its "clean and healthful environment" clause. MCV also placed [billboards in Helena](#) and gave out pins and stickers.



Montana Conservation Voter supporters gathered at the state capitol in Helena for Constitution Day.

MCV also played a key role in fighting back as extreme anti-conservation lawmakers in the legislature attempted to wield their power in an unorthodox way to tip the scales of the 2024 U.S. Senate race. SB 565 and SB 566 would have made it more difficult, if not impossible, for third parties to qualify for the general election ballot. The bill did not apply to any other federal or statewide races and would have sunsetted in 2025—painting a clear target on Senator Jon Tester's seat. MCV lobbied against these bills by generating calls to moderate Republicans on the House State Administration Committee and ultimately succeeded in getting both bills tabled in committee.

In August 2023, a Montana judge sided with youth activists in a landmark lawsuit, ruling that a stable climate falls under the right to a "clean and healthful environment" as guaranteed in the state's Constitution. The youth plaintiffs, ranging in age from 5 to 22, sued the state over legislation that prevents state agencies from considering climate impacts when permitting fossil fuel development. This is an outstanding example of the importance of courts in addressing climate change. MCV's work to protect both the courts and Constitution are vital to upholding the ruling in this and all future suits to combat climate change.

WISCONSIN

Opposing Election Takeovers

Wisconsin has the most partisan gerrymandered state legislative districts in the nation. For example, in 2022, Republicans won 65% of Assembly seats, despite only receiving 48% of the votes. Wisconsin also has one of the most stringent voter ID laws in the nation. The combined impact of these partisan policies have prevented popular legislation supported by the majority of Wisconsin residents from being enacted, including promoting clean energy and protecting clean water and air. Wisconsin Conservation Voters (**WCV**) has worked to defeat far-right efforts to use gerrymandering to disenfranchise voters and remain entrenched in power.

In 2023, Republican state legislators continued their attempts to unfairly influence elections with direct attacks on the redistricting process after the Wisconsin Supreme Court agreed to hear a case challenging the constitutionality of currently drawn districts. WCV activated its membership in opposition to a bill that would give the State Legislature exclusive control over the drawing of maps. In November, WCV co-hosted rallies in Madison, Milwaukee, and Green Bay to show support for fair maps, and WCV's opposition to the bill kept it from moving through the legislature.



In November, Wisconsin Conservation Voters and partners rallied for fair maps in Madison.

WCV worked every possible angle to move pro-voter policies forward and secure the governor's support to veto bad bills. As part of the budget negotiation process, WCV provided the legislature with a [list of recommendations](#) that included funding Gov. Evers' proposal for implementing automatic voter registration. In April, WCV held a lobby day at the Capitol, where activists urged their representatives to support adoption of automatic voter registration. The effort to pass automatic voter registration will continue into 2024.

Partisan election takeover attempts have increased in the years since Wisconsinites elected Gov. Tony Evers in 2018. After WCV Action Fund supported the election of Hon. Janet Protasiewicz to the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 2023 — flipping the bench to liberal control after 15 years — Republicans wasted no time in attempting to remove Protasiewicz and the pro-voter Wisconsin Elections Commission (**WEC**) administrator, Meagan Wolfe, from office. WCV has been vocal in support of both Protasiewicz and Wolfe, decrying these blatant attacks as profoundly undemocratic. WCV facilitated the WI Business Leaders for Democracy coalition, which sent a letter in support of Meagan Wolfe with over 20 local business leaders. Neither Hon. Protasiewicz nor WEC administrator Wolfe were removed from office in 2023.

EXPAND THE ELECTORATE

LCV believes no person should ever be denied their right to participate in elections. The CVM works to remove barriers for people so that they can meaningfully participate in decisions that impact their families and communities. This includes supporting measures to expand voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals, immigrants, and young people, enabling them to have a voice in shaping the future of their communities.

A priority for CVM states is restoration and guaranteeing the right to vote, whereby people never lose the right to vote, regardless of incarceration status. Restoration of the right to vote for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals is an essential step in repairing the damage from policies designed to keep Black, Indigenous, and other people of color from holding power and making their voices heard. From the South to the Northwest, CVM affiliates are rectifying this racist and anti-democratic policy.

VIRGINIA

Voting Rights Restoration Amidst Political Challenges

In Virginia, the restoration of voting rights for formerly incarcerated individuals has been a critical and challenging issue, particularly after Governor Glenn Youngkin took office. Traditionally, gubernatorial executive orders have granted blanket restoration yearly for those who have completed their sentences. However, in 2023, Youngkin deviated from the tradition, and the state witnessed the lowest levels of restoration in over a decade, with only about 800 people actually getting their rights restored. The backlog of restoration requests has grown into the thousands.

Youngkin instituted a petitioning system for restoration that is unduly burdensome, adding further barriers for those seeking to regain their voting rights. Moreover, how the governor chooses who to restore rights to and who to deny lacks transparency and has demonstrated bias in its impact.

To fight back, the Virginia League of Conservation Voters (**VALCV**) has taken an active role in building community support for restoration efforts. Virginia presents unique challenges in addressing disenfranchisement, as it is part of the state's Constitution, which was amended in 1902 with the sole purpose of disenfranchising black Virginians. During the legislative session, VALCV supported the adoption of resolution SJ 223, which would automatically and immediately restore voting rights upon release. The committee, led primarily by Republicans, met without prior notice at 7:30 am to vote against the resolution in a 4-1 partisan decision.

Reflecting on its unique position as the only environmentally-focused organization advocating for voting rights restoration in Virginia, VALCV included restoration efforts on its legislative Scorecard, making it clear to lawmakers and candidates that restoration is an essential issue for community groups across the state. VALCV also worked to make it a political liability for the governor and lawmakers to oppose or obstruct restoration efforts, by mobilizing community support and consistently advocating for restoration.

IMPACTED VOICES ON RESTORATION

As one of the last two states that permanently disenfranchise formerly incarcerated individuals, Virginia has a challenging fight to restore rights. In April, the Virginia League of Conservation Voters (VALCV) led a community event in Hampton Roads — a prominent Black community in Virginia — featuring state Senate champion Mamie Locke, who has introduced efforts to repeal felony disenfranchisement year after year.



Virginia LCV held a community event in Hampton Roads to advocate for the repeal of felony disenfranchisement.

The gathering raised awareness and support for the restoration of voting rights, particularly in communities that have been disproportionately affected by disenfranchisement. Richard Walker, the founder and CEO of Bridging The Gap In Virginia, an organization that works to empower formerly incarcerated persons, experienced his own struggles in getting his rights restored.

“Upon my release from incarceration in 2005, I was angry that my civil rights were taken from me. That’s when I began to advocate for change to help those individuals like me that had the same barriers that I had to overcome.

The current Virginia Constitutional Amendment was implemented in 1902, and the sponsor explicitly stated that it was a way to ‘keep the darkies out of our government.’ No one has worked to change this legislation because it was created based on racism.

Governor Youngkin backslid the system so that felons need to directly appeal to him. Why is my freedom determined by one man? It’s going to take us to continue to rally against it and speak out on it.”

*– RICHARD WALKER, formerly incarcerated individual,
speaking at [VALCV’s event in Hampton Roads](#)*

FLORIDA

Community Response to Overcoming Voting Barriers and Chilling Effects

In 2023, following the arrests of dozens of formerly incarcerated citizens for honest mistakes about their eligibility to vote, Florida legislators passed SB 4, which created an election police force designed to further discourage these eligible voters from exercising their right to vote. Florida Conservation Voters (FCV) worked to oppose the bill, arguing that the legislature's intention was to further disenfranchise Black and Latino voters and create a chilling effect on formerly incarcerated voters.

FCV teamed up with partners to provide a series of four New Voter Workshops in South Florida to educate the community about confirming their eligibility to vote, empower returning citizens, and remove barriers that may hinder their ability to engage in the democratic process.

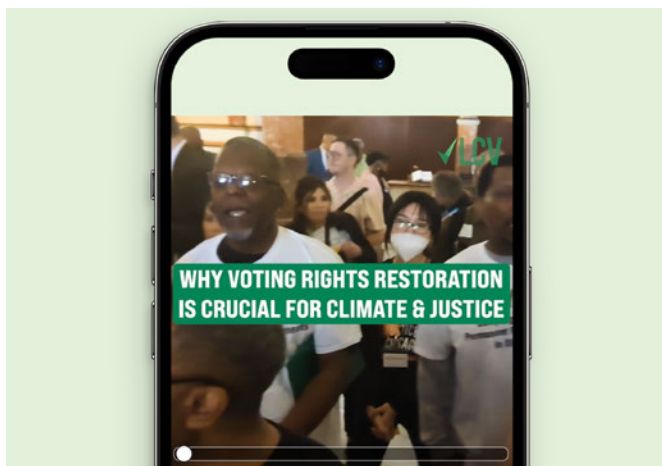
FCV also hosted two workshops for recently naturalized citizens to provide the tools and essential information needed to participate confidently in the democratic process. By equipping new citizens with voting fundamentals, FCV actively worked to prevent any future complications or arrests for pending citizens.

ILLINOIS

Environmental Justice Through Restoration

The Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) worked with Chicago Votes to introduce a bill to guarantee the right to vote for all Illinoisans regardless of their incarceration status, allowing many individuals in environmental justice communities to have the opportunity to impact policy through their right to vote.

Access to the ballot box and the promotion of democracy for all is the best way to move Illinoisans towards true environmental justice for communities. In collaboration with LCV, IEC produced an [informational video](#), making the explicit connection between guaranteeing the right to vote for people with a felony conviction and having a voice in fighting for environmental justice in their communities.



The Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) released a video on the importance of guaranteeing the right to vote for all Illinoisans regardless of their incarceration status.

Though Illinois has a Democratic supermajority in both chambers of the General Assembly, there have been roadblocks in passing voting restoration bills. When the proposed reform last went through the House, it fell short on the floor by only a handful of votes. In 2023, despite IEC regularly monitoring vote counts and lobbying House members, the bill lacked the momentum of previous sessions and failed to pass. Despite these challenges, IEC still managed to help the bill gain eight co-sponsors. Going forward, IEC is reassessing its strategy to ensure rights restoration will finally get over the finish line.

CALIFORNIA

Trailblazing Efforts for Inclusion

California Environmental Voters (**EnviroVoters**) is at the forefront of ongoing efforts to both re-enfranchise incarcerated voters and lower the voting age, allowing 17-year-olds to participate in all public elections throughout the state. The vehicle for these reforms are bills still awaiting passage in the legislature, which, once passed, will put the question of whether to expand the electorate to California voters in 2024.

RIGHTS RESTORATION & LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Two bold bills in California build on work other states are doing to expand the electorate. **ACA 4** is similar to legislation that several states — including Maine, Vermont, Washington D.C, and Puerto Rico — have already adopted to affirm the right to vote regardless of a voter's past. **SCA 2** is innovative in that it would make California the first state to lower the voting age statewide, though several municipalities in California and Maryland have already done so.

EnviroVoters supported ACA 4, which will expand access to voting for the over 90,000 people currently incarcerated in the state, contributing to a more inclusive democracy for communities of color who are systemically and unfairly over-incarcerated and overpoliced. EnviroVoters worked with the bill sponsor to lobby lawmakers for the bill, leading the way for coalition partners to do the same. EnviroVoters is also working to support reforms to expand pre-trial vote centers outside of Los Angeles, which is a crucial step toward ensuring that eligible pre-trial voters have the opportunity to vote.

EnviroVoters simultaneously advocated for SCA 2, a bill lowering the voting age to 17, which would increase youth voter engagement and foster lifelong voting habits for an increasingly diverse subset of voters. EnviroVoters secured co-sponsors and confirmed at least two Senate votes for the bill. EnviroVoters is poised to help pass the bills in early 2024 to make it to the ballot in November 2024. By engaging with legislators, partnering with organizations, and advocating for these critical initiatives, EnviroVoters played a significant role in shaping the future of democracy and electoral fairness in the state.

VERMONT

Expanding Rights to All Community Members

Vermont Conservation Voters (**VCV**) worked to support allies in the adoption of expanded rights for residents of Vermont. Several municipalities already allow legal resident non-U.S. citizens to vote in local elections, but Burlington, the state's most populous city, does not. VCV supported partner organizations in their work to gather support for a ballot measure to expand voting to non-U.S. citizens who reside in Burlington.

After passing the Burlington referendum in March, the policy was then passed through the legislature, where VCV continued its support. The measure was successfully passed when the Vermont legislature overrode the governor's veto of the bill. Thanks to the hard work of activists and organizers in refugee communities, Burlington becomes the third city in the state to allow noncitizens to have a voice in the communities where they live.

OREGON

Senate Walkouts Disrupt Progress

Oregon's bill to guarantee voting rights to all citizens regardless of incarceration status had the most promise of any among states with similar legislation in 2023, thanks to the support of a strong and diverse coalition of organizations and community groups. The Oregon League of Conservation Voters (**OLCV**) has been a consistent supporter and ally in these fights.

In 2023, legislative progress was stalled by a six-week Republican walkout, the longest in recent years. OLCV supported passage of a ballot measure in 2022 to encourage Republicans to show up for work. The 10 Senate Republicans with over 10 unexcused absences in 2023 will not be able to run for reelection because of this ballot measure.

Because of the walkout, lawmakers only had eight frantic days to pass essential legislation to keep the state functional, such as the budget. Despite these delays, the bill to guarantee voting rights passed the Senate committee before the walkout. In the committee hearing on the bill, OLCV helped to secure over 140 community members and organizations to testify in favor.

OLCV held a rally in Salem and supported substantial communications work around these walkouts, including press outreach, action alerts, and targeted rallies. Targeting three senators, OLCV organized in-district rallies and pressure tactics. The Senate only needed a single Republican to show back up to the Capitol to be able to continue work to pass priority legislation. Before the walkout ended, OLCV also worked with Democratic leadership to ensure that the Republican Senate walkouts couldn't bring a 'kill bill list' that included important voting rights reforms. OLCV and partners' efforts brought the walkout to a close with eight days left in the session, allowing lawmakers to pass essential legislation.



Oregon League of Conservation Voters rallied in Salem to pressure Republican lawmakers to return to session for debate and deliberation on critical legislation.

SECURE NATIONAL STANDARDS

The federal Freedom to Vote Act encompasses landmark election reforms that would standardize voting practices nationally. Like the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, the passage of the Freedom to Vote Act must overcome current political and procedural barriers. Until that day is a reality, states have been working to pass national standards one-by-one. These standards dismantle barriers erected to keep Black, Indigenous, young, and new citizens from voting — including long lines, fewer polling places, targeted restrictions on voter registration, and unabashed voter intimidation. The CVM pushes for bold state-level reforms from the Freedom to Vote Act, particularly around vote-by-mail and registration.

As a vestige of Jim Crow, voter registration remains one of the biggest barriers to voter participation. There are many reasons why someone doesn't vote, but only a handful of reasons why they can't. Because the CVM has one of the strongest nonpartisan voter registration programs in the country, CVM state affiliates are uniquely positioned to advocate for modernization of registration systems. States across the CVM worked to pass pro-voter policies like same-day registration and expand automatic registration beyond the Department of Motor Vehicles.

When health and safety concerns during the pandemic illuminated accessibility limitations, like restrictions on who can use absentee ballots, vote-by-mail (VBM) saw a rapid expansion in many states, and in 2023 states fought to keep these pro-voter reforms. CVM states did not just protect VBM — they improved it to ensure every ballot is counted through reforms like ballot curing and standardizing dropbox use.



UTAH

Vote-By-Mail Triumphs Secure Indigenous Voting Rights

Utah boasts one of the most progressive vote-by-mail systems in the country and has had all-mail elections since 2016. Over 90% of votes cast in Utah are through mail-in voting.

In 2023, extreme Republicans and anti-voter politicians introduced numerous bills that aimed to undermine this system, including a bill to grant counties the option to opt out of vote-by-mail elections and a bill to completely eliminate vote-by-mail. **The Rural Utah Project (RUP) organized quickly and defeated both bills.**

Swift mobilization allowed RUP to rally a significant number of people to combat these bills. RUP worked with legislators to strategically place the bills at the bottom of the agenda, where they were defeated in committee — well before the risk of passage on the chamber floors.

RUP's strong relationships with partner organizations and connections with the committee chair proved crucial in their victory. Through equity-minded efforts, RUP provided travel stipends to rural Utahns, specifically Indigenous individuals from the Navajo Nation, ensuring their representation and amplifying their voices in the fight against attacks on vote-by-mail.

Indigenous voters in Utah have faced innumerable barriers to voting, from deliberate voter suppression to incidental and systemic barriers. In 2022, 169 mail-in ballots were rejected in San Juan County, Utah's only Indigenous-majority county. Most were cast by Indigenous voters and were thrown out for missing or mismatched signatures. Determined to ensure Indigenous voters would not be unfairly disenfranchised in San Juan County again, **RUP helped to pass a bill in 2023 requiring counties to have uniform notice and curing standards** and an internal process to address issues with vote-by-mail ballots.

Working over the last three legislative sessions with the Let Utah Vote coalition, RUP built relationships with legislators, including a Republican bill sponsor, who played a pivotal role in the success of this bill's passage. By holding a lobby day and conducting targeted phone banking and texting before the bill was heard in the House, **RUP ensured that the bill passed out of the House unanimously.** The bill will ensure that every vote is counted in the next election.



The Rural Utah Project organized a lobby day and spoke with House members in support of legislation that would ensure vote-by-mail ballots are fairly counted.

WESTERN STATES LEAD THE WAY IN ENSURING ACCESSIBLE VOTE-BY-MAIL

Even as Republican-led states have imposed new restrictions on mail ballot programs since 2020, vote-by-mail remains widely popular with voters. Though the landscape of mail voting usage varies by state, most Western states' mail-in ballot usage far exceeded the 2022 midterm national average mail-in ballot use of 31.9%.

In the Western United States, many states have recognized the importance of providing accessible voting options for their large rural populations, making vote-by-mail a cornerstone of efforts to safeguard the democratic process in places like Arizona, Montana, Nebraska, Idaho, and Alaska. **Collectively, CVM organizations in these states defeated 18 bills seeking to restrict or eliminate vote-by-mail.**

- **Arizona (80.1% mail ballot rate):** Chispa Arizona ran a successful advocacy campaign to ensure the retention of the state's permanent mail-in voting list, guaranteeing voters' continued access to vote-by-mail even if they choose to not vote in an election. Chispa Arizona also successfully opposed legislation that would have allowed political party-appointed individuals to oversee the entire signature verification process. Additionally, they successfully advocated against requirements for on-site tabulation of ballots, which would have hindered the efficiency of the voting process, created confusion for voters, and delayed election results for mail-in ballots.
- **Montana (78.2% mail ballot rate):** Several bills were introduced to terminate no-excuse absentee voting and create a requirement for absentee ballots to be sent to a voter's primary residence. These provisions could have created hardships for Native voters and students who receive their ballots through P.O. boxes. Montana Conservation Voters played a vital role in stopping these bills from passing.
- **Nebraska (35.4% mail ballot rate):** Nebraska Conservation Voters (NCV) worked to oppose bills threatening to eliminate vote-by-mail entirely. NCV's negotiation skills and dedication to preserving the accessibility of vote-by-mail ensured that provisions in these bills were rendered toxic to legislators, thus preventing any adverse impacts on the vote-by-mail system.
- **Idaho (21.6% mail ballot rate):** The majority of Idahoans who use mail ballot options are older voters, come from working families, or live in rural communities. When a bill that sought to limit no-excuse vote-by-mail to only a small percentage of Idahoans was introduced in the state legislature, Conservation Voters for Idaho (CVI) utilized data from the May 2022 primary to demonstrate to lawmakers the importance of absentee ballots — including data showing some legislators had won their primaries with fewer votes than absentee ballots cast. Additionally, CVI supporters who vote by mail submitted almost 200 comments to their representatives to oppose VBM restrictions. Thanks to CVI's efforts, the bill failed on the House floor.
- **Alaska (14.6% mail ballot rate):** Lawmakers introduced a bill to create and enhance offenses related to vote-by-mail, require signature matching on mail-in ballots, and limit the types of ID allowed when requesting mail-in ballots. The Alaska Center activated its base to oppose and successfully defeat this restrictive vote-by-mail legislation.

NEW MEXICO

Implementing National Standards

In 2023, New Mexico took a crucial step to secure national voting best practices and standards and addressed the disparity in participation between White voters and Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other voters of color in the state. With the passage of HB 4, the Voter Rights Protection Act in the 2023 legislative session, New Mexico moved toward a more accessible and equitable democracy for all. The bill also included a **Native Voting Rights Act, which makes New Mexico the first state to enshrine Native voting rights into statute.**

After HB 4's adoption, Conservation Voters New Mexico (**CVNM**) pushed election administrators and state leadership to fully and equitably implement this legislation and ramped up their work with Indigenous and rural communities. Reforms included:

- ✓ Expanding the timeframe for when Indigenous tribes, nations, and pueblos can request alternate voting sites
- ✓ Enacting automatic restoration of rights
- ✓ Extending the early voting period through the Sunday before Election Day
- ✓ Creating a permanent absentee voter list
- ✓ Extending deadlines for mail-in ballots
- ✓ Instituting a State Election Day Holiday
- ✓ Adopting same-day voter registration

At the same time, a far-right conservative coalition has been working to gather community petition signatures to repeal the law and remand it to a statewide referendum. CVNM worked alongside partners to monitor and make preparations to respond to the initiative in case it gains momentum in 2024.

PENNSYLVANIA

Automatic Registration through Administrative Action

The momentum behind automatic voter registration (AVR) has experienced significant growth since its first adoption nationally in 2016. With public opinion and investment in AVR at an all-time high, the Pennsylvania Department of State used administrative measures to implement an opt-out AVR process at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), streamlining how voters make it onto the voter roll.

Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania (**CVPA**) worked for several sessions to garner support among decision-makers, lobby legislators, and develop a strong relationship with the executive and election administration offices. Working alongside coalition partners. **CVPA's efforts helped ensure that however AVR was secured, it would have broad support to remain unchallenged.**

Governor Shapiro's announcement on National Voter Registration Day signaled to the 1.2 million unregistered but eligible voters in the state that they would not be left behind.

MICHIGAN

Expanding Democracy

Michigan voters overwhelmingly passed Prop 2 in November 2022, enhancing election security while expanding voting access for every eligible Michigander. The efforts of Michigan League of Conservation Voters (**MLCV**), as part of the Promote the Vote Coalition, ensured that bills vital for the implementation of Prop 2 passed through a transformed Michigan legislature. MLCV's strong relationship with the secretary of state allowed them to effectively address concerns, clarify issues, and work towards the comprehensive implementation of Prop 2.

Michigan LCV's Democracy for All Director Brooke Harris testifies in front of state legislators about voting rights.



Early in 2023, MLCV was part of a legislative convening where MLCV worked with local election clerks to address clerks' questions and concerns about implementation. By actively engaging with clerks at the convening and co-leading the clerk engagement workgroup, MLCV ensured their essential insights were incorporated into the smooth execution of Prop 2. MLCV worked with leaders of the House and Senate election committees to streamline the legislative process through budget negotiations. **All critical Prop 2 bills passed and \$77.5 million was allocated for implementation.** Other reforms MLCV helped pass include:

- ✓ Permanent absentee voter list
- ✓ Ballot curing and tracking
- ✓ Voter ID expansion, including student and tribal IDs
- ✓ More equitably-placed drop boxes
- ✓ Early voting and expansion of polling location options
- ✓ Extension of deadline for overseas and military ballots
- ✓ Pre-canvassing vote-by-mail ballots
- ✓ Automatic voter registration expansion to the healthy authority
- ✓ Overturning the prohibition on rides to the polls

CONNECTICUT

Equitable Access Through Early Voting and No-Excuse Absentee Voting

In 2022, Connecticut voters overwhelmingly came out in support of a ballot measure to establish in-person early voting. In 2023, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters (CTLCV) worked with Governor Ned Lamont and the secretary of state to pass enacting legislation to implement and define its execution. CTLCV encouraged their grassroots base to show out in support of equitable implementation of early voting, such as ensuring adequate funding for local election administrators to run early voting centers. As a mark of their achievements, CTLCV was invited by the governor to the signing of 14 days of early voting into law.



In June, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters staff attend Gov. Lamont's signing of the bill that established early in-person voting.

CTLCV also supported a No-Excuse Absentee bill that would allow any voter to vote by mail. By passing the bill, the question of adoption will now be put to the voters in November 2024. CTLCV will work to educate voters in 2024 about the benefits of no-excuse absentee voting.

OREGON

Leading the Way Beyond the DMV

After implementing automatic voter registration in 2016, voter registration rates in Oregon significantly increased. 270,000 additional voters were registered within the first year of AVR, and the state's voter registration rate rose from 73.2% to 86.1% that year. As the first state to adopt AVR, Oregon once again led the way in 2023 by expanding AVR beyond its original association with the Department of Motor Vehicles to include healthcare agencies.

In 2023, Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV) successfully worked to pass expansion of AVR in a single session, despite a six-week Senate walkout that shortened the timeline to pass it to eight days. With the bill's passage, the Oregon Health Authority was added to the list of agencies that automatically register eligible voters when they interact with the state healthcare system. As a result, Oregon is one step closer to achieving universal voter registration, where no eligible voter is turned away because of a procedural registration barrier.

MAINE

Successful Session Tees Up 2024

Maine had one of the highest voter turnouts (61.8%) nationally in the 2022 midterm elections, a direct result of its pro-democracy policies. Maine Conservation Voters (MCV) worked to build on those strong policies to ensure all voters in the state can easily access the ballot. Co-leading the Mainers for Modern Elections coalition, **MCV achieved another victory for accessible elections this legislative session by helping to pass a bill that allows every voter to sign up for an ongoing absentee mailing list**, streamlining the process of voting by mail.

As MCV worked to improve the mail-in ballot process, Republicans worked to undermine it, proposing two bills that would discourage and outright prohibit the use of dropboxes, which are used by 40% of voters nationally. MCV worked with coalition members to prevent those bad bills from passing.

MCV was highly active at the State House through the Mainers for Modern Election coalition. At the same time, because of MCV's coalition leadership, they were also able to coordinate the most compelling messengers for the issue at hand, connecting impacted constituents and organizations representing those communities with their representatives. MCV also leveraged relationships with the secretary of state and local election administrators to address concerns and ensure sufficient funding for staffing in those offices, effectively removing barriers to gain their support for critical legislation.



MCV Development Manager Chloe Hoffman, Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, and MCV Deputy Director Rani Sheaffer at the State House in Augusta on Conservation Lobby Day.

WASHINGTON

Expanding Access to the Ballot Box

Washington Conservation Action (**WCA**), along with partners in the Washington Voting Justice Coalition, worked to pass six major legislative voting rights expansions and protections in 2023. Of these six bills, WCA was successful in passing four:

- ✓ **HB 1048:** Amends the Washington Voting Rights Act by improving the ability of people of color to seek legal remedies in cases of voting rights violations. While efforts to pass preclearance requirements did not succeed, the Voting Rights Act bill still directed courts to interpret election laws to prioritize equal access to the ballot box for all. Critically, it expands who has the right to sue when violations occur, including Native American tribes and coalitions of multiple racial or language groups.
- ✓ **SB 5112:** Expands automatic voter registration to be an opt-out process.
- ✓ **SB 5208:** Allows voters without driver's licenses to use online voter registration.
- ✓ **SB 5082:** Removes confusing and unenforceable "advisory votes" from Washington ballots and replaces them with actual useful information on the budgeting work.

WCA's commitment to enhancing democracy and promoting voting rights, and their involvement in the Washington Voting Justice Coalition, helps ensure that future legislative sessions will continue to be fruitful advances of an inclusive and representative democracy for all residents of Washington.



Washington Conservation Voters joined partners at a Free the Vote mural unveiling in Tacoma to raise public awareness of the restoration of voting rights.

NEVADA

Streamlining Voting Options

Chispa Nevada (**Chispa NV**), a project of LCV, along with the Let Nevadans Vote coalition, advocated for the passage of a dozen pro-voter reforms in 2023. Chispa NV provided expert testimony and activated its membership to lead on major reforms that were signed into law by the governor, including:

- ✓ Improving signage for polling places so voters don't forfeit their votes when a polling place is hard to locate.
- ✓ Streamlining vote-by-mail procedures so all counties use the same vote-by-mail ballot and process to deliver and receive ballots.
- ✓ Establishing polling places in jails so that pre-trial detainees who retain the right to vote can vote.

These reforms will have a significant impact on ballot access for historically disenfranchised communities.

BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR SAME-DAY REGISTRATION PROGRESS IN 2024

CVM states have been steadily building the foundations for substantial electoral reforms, particularly concerning the implementation of same-day registration (SDR). Despite some reluctance in northeastern states — driven by concerns about the potential impact on primary elections — the prospect of enacting SDR remains unfulfilled in 2023, yet promising for 2024.

- **Pennsylvania:** CVPA worked strategically to ensure that any future compromises for election reforms with conservative lawmakers pass only if they also establish same-day registration.
- **New Jersey:** New Jersey LCV advocated for same-day registration and co-hosted events, including a public education event to engage voters and activists on how SDR can increase voter turnout, inspire participants to take action, and urge lawmakers to pass this important legislation. New Jersey LCV ran crowd canvasses in targeted legislative leaders' districts and hand-delivered postcards from those leaders' constituents. They also ran a digital ad campaign that achieved over 355,000 impressions.
- **New York:** NYLCV worked with coalition partners to evaluate the feasibility of passing SDR as a constitutional amendment.
- **Massachusetts:** While the Environmental League of Massachusetts was focused on implementing the VOTES Act achieved in 2022, they also advocated to keep SDR legislation moving.

DIVERSIFY REPRESENTATION

Diverse representation strengthens the legitimacy of our country's democratic institutions by reflecting the true demographic makeup of the population, fostering greater public trust and participation. This diversity in representation promotes a broader range of perspectives and solutions, which is essential for addressing complex societal challenges.

Even as our country is [breaking historical records](#) for diversity of our elected leaders, the reality is that our government is still far from being truly reflective of our nation's diversity. For example, only 28% of members of Congress identify as women, and only 23% identify as people of color.

State legislative bodies are no different, and in some states, they are worse. In fact, a majority of state legislatures have moved towards being [less diverse](#) or seen no gains in the last decade. LCV works with each CVM state affiliate to identify solutions to this issue.

One such solution is ranked choice voting (RCV). Studies show that RCV promotes more diverse and representative elected bodies, as candidates from underrepresented communities have a better chance of winning in a system that values broad support. Recognizing that RCV isn't a one-size-fits all solution for each state, we're focused on places where it will make the biggest impact.

Another solution is to end partisan and racial gerrymandering by ensuring laws and map-drawers enact fair maps. When districts are drawn impartially, candidates from various parties have a more level playing field, encouraging a broader range of candidates to run for office. Fair redistricting practices prevent the dilution of the voting power of communities of color and allow these communities to elect leaders who most closely reflect their needs.

ALASKA

Stepping Up for Ranked Choice Voting



Since Alaska voters passed ranked choice voting (RCV) via ballot measure in 2020, RCV has become increasingly popular and impactful, allowing more diverse leaders to be elected and producing a huge crop of new and moderate state legislators. This expansion of voices in the legislature has not been welcomed by all. The 2023 legislative session was the first opportunity lawmakers had to repeal or amend RCV, and far-right politicians wasted no time in launching legislative attacks.

In February, the Alaska Center (AKC) rallied support to protect RCV against two bills that would repeal it, SB 2 and HB 1. AKC made 3,000 calls to constituents and canvassed more than 200 people, resulting in 90 pro-RCV comments to legislators. With a ratio of 5:1 of those testifying in favor of RCV versus against, the hearings showed legislators that Alaskans would not let RCV die quietly. As a result, both bills were tabled and never brought up again during the session.

Another bill, HB 4, emerged as a significant concern despite AKC leading the way in more than 20 lobbying meetings with target legislators. The Alaska House held a hearing on the bill, where AKC activated grassroots leaders to submit over 200 written comments, conducted call campaigns to legislative offices, and coordinated testimony. **Impressively, 68% of those testifying expressed support for RCV, illuminating the effectiveness of AKC's mobilization efforts.** Because AKC and partner organizations turned out supporters in such great numbers for the second time on the same issue, the House committee was compelled to hold another day of public comments.

When the bill moved into the judiciary committee, AKC turned out *another* 200 public comments. AKC remains watchful for any similar bills that may arise in future sessions, but is confident that legislative rollbacks of RCV have been squashed.

Working with new and seasoned legislators alike, AKC's tireless efforts to support RCV successfully uplifted marginalized voices in Alaska, especially among Indigenous Alaskans. Mary Peltola's historic victory in 2022 as the first Democrat representing Alaska in the U.S. House in almost 50 years is a testament to the transformative power of RCV. **Peltola's election not only breaks long-standing partisan barriers but also marks a significant milestone by making her the first Alaska Native to serve in Congress and the first woman to hold the state's sole U.S. House seat.**

RANKED CHOICE VOTING EDUCATION

As a newer policy area among democracy reforms, educating the public and lawmakers about ranked choice voting and whether it is right for their state and community is a critical step towards passage. CVM states have started the conversation by introducing several bills in Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Vermont, and Washington. CVM states are leading the charge in providing the necessary educational groundwork to engage the public as states head into 2024, when ranked choice voting ballot measures will be on the ballot across the country.

VERMONT

Empowering the People for a More Democratic and Inclusive Future

Vermont Conservation Voters (**VCV**) worked to educate the public on the benefits of ranked choice voting and why it's right for Vermont through a variety of creative informational efforts. In Burlington, VCV hosted a "Drag Out the Vote" event, where the crowd voted for their favorite drag performer using ranked choice voting.



In November, Vermont Conservation Voters hosted a "Drag Out the Vote" event in support of ranked choice voting.

In addition to pushing for ranked choice voting in 2024, VCV has also built a strong working relationship with the Vermont secretary of state to start considering a Vermont Voting Rights Act.

GEORGIA

Pushing for Equitable Representation

Georgia Conservation Voters (**GCV**) supported several plurality voting bills such as ranked choice voting. Even though these bills did not pass, GCV ensured ranked choice voting didn't lose momentum by supporting another bill to create a bipartisan study commission appointed to review the failed ranked choice voting bills. The authors of the study commission bill included four Democrats and nine Republicans. GCV worked with partners to track progress on all ranked choice voting bills and engaged in tactics to move them forward. The study commission bill ran out of time to pass before the end of session.

GCV worked to address another major hindrance to electing officials who are reflective of the communities they represent. Georgia's Public Service Commission (PSC) plays a vital oversight role for utilities in Georgia — a role that has been largely ignored by commissioners who are sympathetic to corporate interests. In November 2023, a five-judge panel allowed Georgia to continue racially gerrymandering its PSC maps. GCV is exploring both legal and legislative remedies for 2024 to ensure Black voters are not disenfranchised despite the court's ruling.

"This ruling is another act of continuing discrimination against Black voters in Georgia. Voters should have an opportunity to vote for a public service commissioner that is responsive to their needs and represents their community."

– BRIONTÉ MCCORKLE, GCV Executive Director

MONTANA

Preserving Independent Redistricting

In 2023, Republican legislators introduced amendments to Montana's Constitution that would have eviscerated the state's independent redistricting process, allowed the Republican-dominated legislature to gerrymander future congressional and legislative maps, and diluted Indigenous representation. One bill would have required the legislature to approve new maps, giving the legislature final authority over Montana's Independent Redistricting Commission.

Another bill would have reduced the commission from five members to four and given Republicans a disproportionate voice in the process. **MCV successfully defeated both bills and defended the state's redistricting process** against politicians seeking to return to a system where they could pick their voters.

During the most recent legislative redistricting, MCV drove testimony to hearings held by the Independent Redistricting Commission, where MCV Program Director Jocelyn Leroux testified at the final hearing in the Capitol. **Ultimately, the commission approved MCV's preferred map.**

In October, MCV filed a lawsuit against the Montana secretary of state on the basis that new Public Service Commission maps run afoul of the Montana Constitution's clause guaranteeing free and open elections. MCV's work to secure nonpartisan courts and the recent legal victory in combating climate change created the right conditions to bring this legal challenge.



“The [Public Service Commission] map was designed to eliminate competition, rather than to equalize population and keep communities whole and regional interests together to represent the diverse regional interests of Montanans.”

– MOLLY BELL, MCV Political Director

CALIFORNIA

Empowering Fair Local Redistricting in California

In 2023, California Environmental Voters (**EnviroVoters**) extended its support of fair maps beyond the current statewide independent redistricting commission. Following fair maps principles to draw maps for cities and counties that do not prioritize politics over people, AB 1248 is a bill to make every vote matter by ensuring that during redistricting, communities are drawn into districts with complementary interests. To help pass the bill, EnviroVoters built stronger connections and built its reputation as a democracy powerhouse.

EnviroVoters' is known as a winning strategic partner and a prominent voice by legislators and coalition partners alike, as they are able to garner support from both progressive and moderate legislators of either party. EnviroVoters staff were specifically invited to give expert testimony on AB 1248. **The bill passed and made its way to Governor Gavin Newsom's desk in September.** EnviroVoters provided strategic advice to coalition partners to keep the bill moving and strategically targeted Bay Area senators who were in opposition. Notably, one of these senators who had previously put up a roadblock came out in support, highlighting the effectiveness of EnviroVoters' support.

This commitment to fair redistricting has also translated into support for other key bills, such as SB 52, which aims to establish fair maps in the city of Los Angeles, where EnviroVoters gave expert testimony several times, and AB 764, which requires that local districts be formed following fair redistricting principles. While AB 1248 and SB 52 were ultimately vetoed by the governor, EnviroVoters is committed to bring the issue up again in 2024 and address the governor's budget concerns head on.

OREGON

Addressing Legislator Pay

In 2022, three progressive legislators in Oregon, all mothers to school-aged children, announced they would not seek re-election because of low pay, averaging \$35,000 per year. Recognizing that low pay creates severe inequities in who can realistically run for and hold office, Oregon League of Conservation Voters (**OLCV**) worked with Oregon legislators to overwhelmingly pass SJR 34, which establishes the Independent Public Service Compensation Commission to set legislator pay. This move aims to allow more diverse candidates from a variety of backgrounds to run for state office, including Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, women, and working parents. The measure will appear on the ballot in November 2024 for voter approval.

LOOKING AHEAD

For the 2024 legislative sessions, CVM states are wholeheartedly taking on the challenge of big bold policy reforms. **Our movement is characterized by a profound commitment to ensuring the democratic process works for all people, regardless of where they live or what they look like.** Our mission is to bring about sweeping pro-voter policy changes across the country while securing our elections against anti-democratic attacks.



PROTECT VOTERS

In the ongoing battle for voting rights, the CVM is working to create a groundswell of support at the state level to reinstate voter protections stripped by decades of conservative court packing. This state-to-federal movement seeks to create a powerful momentum that leads the country to comprehensive federal reform. At the heart of this movement is a commitment to ensuring that voters of color are protected at the state level. State affiliates are at the forefront of this effort by continuing their efforts to enshrine critical legal protections for voters through State Voting Rights Acts.



DEFEND THE FREEDOM TO VOTE

The state of democracy in the United States faces unprecedented challenges. With the looming threat of attacks during the 2024 presidential election, it is critical to secure the future of democratic governance by meeting these attacks where they are — in state legislative chambers, election administrators offices, and at polling places themselves. Every state in the CVM will use considerable political power, legislative prowess, and an active membership base to defeat anti-voter legislation — just as we did in 2023.



EXPAND THE ELECTORATE

The fight for the voting rights of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, who are disproportionately people of color, continues in the states. By breaking the cycle of disenfranchisement, we create a more inclusive and participatory democracy. To begin addressing the mass incarceration problem in our country, CVM states work to guarantee the right to vote regardless of conviction status to address systemic racial disparities.



SECURE NATIONAL STANDARDS

In 2024, even as we anticipate Republican assaults on voter access, the CVM will work to establish national voting standards designed to make the voter experience universally simple and safe. Expanding automatic voter registration, adopting same-day registration, and improving vote-by-mail will be a focus for states across the nation, providing state-to-federal momentum for the passage of the federal Freedom to Vote Act.



DIVERSIFY REPRESENTATION

Several states are taking on passing ranked choice voting through ballot referendums, giving voters the power to shape the future of our elections. At the same time, the CVM is working to reduce the influence of money in politics and the consequences of extreme gerrymandering.



In November, Wisconsin Conservation Voters and partners rallied for fair district maps in Milwaukee.



Our Earth Is Worth Fighting For

For more information or to get involved, visit lcv.org

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