**Why Voting rights matter for the Conservation Voter Movement?**

The League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (LCVEF) seeks to operate at the nexus of large-scale voter mobilization, transformational community organizing and structural democracy reform. When our political system fails to represent all voices, those excluded from it are often the same communities of color and young people most impacted by climate change and climate injustices. We are committed to working in collaboration with those communities by investing our time, our resources, and leveraging our access to institutional power to strive for a just democratic system.

Since the founding of this country — when only white, male landowners were given the right to vote — progress towards equal access to the ballot and fair representation has been slow but abiding. The history of voter suppression and exclusion of people of color, women and indigenous people from our democracy has had profound impacts on every facet of our society and institutions. With today's rapidly changing demographics and ever-shifting voting laws, voter participation has never been more consequential.

We live in a precarious and consequential moment in American history: democracy will endure and thrive as people push back against existential threats, or it will erode. Fortunately, in the last two years we saw achievements on multiple fronts related to voter access: rights restoration in Florida; automatic voter registration in states like Nevada and Michigan; redistricting reform in Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio and Utah; same-day voter registration in Maryland; key victories in state-level supreme courts like North Carolina and historic midterm turnout in the 2018 elections across the country. At the same time, we’ve seen a steady erosion in trust in public institutions, the retirement of Justice Kennedy and appointment of Brett Kavanaugh — potentially cementing an anti-voting rights majority on the Supreme Court of the United States for a generation — and rampant voter suppression impacting elections in places like Georgia and North Dakota. In addition, gerrymandered districts continued to crack and stack communities of color to dilute the power of their collective voice.

LCVEF and our sister organization LCV have made voting rights a cornerstone of the Conservation Voter Movement (CVM), investing time and resources into efforts that will expand voter access. Our goal is to create a coordinated, cohesive national strategy that advances voting rights across the CVM while being tailored to the needs and opportunities of each state. We look to achieve concrete victories that will stop voter suppression policies or practices, and/or pass proactive voting reforms. By doing this we can spend more time resources getting community members to the polls rather than fighting for individuals to have easy access to the polls.

We can see a clear example in Colorado as state leading on voting rights and to access the polls such as same-day voter registration, pre-registration starting at 16-year-olds and vote by mail increases voter turnout and participation. Colorado had the second-highest voter turnout in the nation during this midterm election. Almost 2.6 million Coloradans voted in the midterm election, the Secretary of State’s Office said – which is 62.7 percent of the population that’s eligible to vote. More than 75 percent of active voters participated in the 2018 midterm election, and 65.2 percent of registered voters. A vast majority of people – 95 percent – mailed in or dropped off their ballots, with the rest voting in person.

In 2019-2020, we LCVEF will continue this momentum with a focus on the following strategies:

* Follow through on key voting rights ballot measure wins from 2018, by engaging in the often complicated implementation process of policies like Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), redistricting reform and rights restoration. These policies were passed by the will of the voters, but state legislatures and governors’ administrations must now apply the new laws fairly and correctly. State leagues will mobilize members and the media to keep attention on these issues, demonstrate to decision-makers public support for strong and full implementation.
* Lead and participate in coalitions working to advance pro-democracy reforms to:
  + Establish Automatic Voter Registration in Arizona, Colorado, Maine, New Hampshire and New Mexico;
  + Expand early voting locations and hours in Arizona, Nevada and Wisconsin;
  + Promote redistricting reform in New Hampshire; and
  + Restore the right to vote for individuals previously convicted of felonies while they are incarcerated or on parole in New Mexico.

LCVEF is committed to ensuring that the actions we take to fight climate change benefit those hit hardest. We must fight against threats to their civic participation in a substantive way because our political system and democracy is weakened when people are excluded from it. Thus it is so important for the Conservation Voter Movement to register and mobilize voters, expand voting rights and voting access as a priority for the environment. Succeeding in the fight to save our planet is inextricably linked to the fight to save our democracy.