A RESOLUTION

Calling on the United States Congress to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act and the For the People Act, to secure voting rights and to protect against state laws that suppress voting rights.

WHEREAS, Philadelphia City Council believes that the unabridged right to vote is a hallmark of democracy that must be guarded, strengthened and preserved; and

WHEREAS, The Pew Center estimates that at least 51 million eligible U.S. citizens are not registered to vote, which constitutes more than 24% of the eligible population; and

WHEREAS, The Government Accountability Office has found that Voter ID laws disproportionately target and affect low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, the elderly, and people with disabilities, and effectively lower participation rates in elections; and

WHEREAS, The Supreme Court decision in Shelby County v. Holder made clear that the United States Congress should update Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act, which establishes how states must obtain preclearance before changing the time, place, or manner of elections; and

WHEREAS, The requirement of preclearance ensures that states or jurisdictions with a history of discriminatory practices may not change their election laws without proving to the Department of Justice that the changes will not disenfranchise racial, ethnic, or language minority voters; and

WHEREAS, Hours after the Shelby County decision, then-Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott sought to implement voter identification laws and redistrict maps without federal approval; and

WHEREAS, Two months later, state legislators in North Carolina enacted HB 589, with strict photo identification requirements, curtailed early voting, and the elimination of same day registration, pre-registration, annual voter registration drives, and late polling hours; and

WHEREAS, This February, state legislators here in Pennsylvania introduced fourteen laws that would eliminate vote by mail and no-excuse absentee ballots, require signature matches on outer envelopes and ballots, exclude all mail-in ballots if not received by election day regardless of postmark date, and require that voters annually re-apply for mail-in ballots; and

WHEREAS, On March 7th, President Joseph R. Biden signed an executive order directing the federal government to facilitate voting rights and access to the polls, which highlighted how voter suppression laws discriminate against African Americans and people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, On March 8th, state legislators in Georgia passed legislation that limits mail-in voting to elderly, disabled, and out-of-town voters, requires a state-approved excuse to vote by mail, and requires photo identification for vote-by-mail and for the return of a ballot; and

WHEREAS, The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which coincides with the 56th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday" when John Lewis crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, is supported by Brennan Center, ACLU, NAACP, and several other voting rights organizations; and

WHEREAS, The For the People Act would expand early and absentee voting, end purges of the voter roll, and establish a national automatic voter registration system, which would add any eligible voters to the voter rolls so long as they met the necessary qualifications; and

WHEREAS, Corporations must also act by divesting from politicians who support voter suppression laws as they divested from those who caused insurrection at the Capitol; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Philadelphia urges the United States Senate to pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act and the For the People Act to invalidate discriminatory state voter suppression laws, expand voter participation, and establish a more equitable legal framework in defense of our sacred right to vote.