

BRENNAN  
CENTER  
FOR JUSTICE

Brennan Center for Justice  
*at New York University School of Law*

161 Avenue of the Americas  
12th Floor  
New York, New York 10013  
212.998.6730 Fax 212.995.4550  
[www.brennancenter.org](http://www.brennancenter.org)

July 24, 2008

Senator Dianne Feinstein, Chair  
Senator Bob Bennett, Ranking Member  
Committee on Rules and Administration  
United States Senate  
305 Russell Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for S. 3308, Veteran Voting Support Act

Dear Senators Feinstein and Bennett:

We write to offer our strong support for legislation introduced earlier this week by Senators Feinstein and Kerry. This important legislation, the "Veteran Voting Support Act," would eliminate barriers that make voting difficult for the men and women in uniform who have so bravely served our country. We urge the Committee to pass this bill immediately, so that it may be considered by Congress and signed by the President in time for the Fall elections.

The Veteran Voting Support Act breaks down barriers to voting by veterans and honors our commitment to protect the rights of those who have fought for us all. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has refused to designate VA facilities as voter registration agencies, and this important bill will right that unfortunate, bureaucratic wrong.

The legislation would require the VA to make voter registration services available at VA facilities in states that request it, including providing voter registration forms and assisting veterans with submitting registrations. It would require the VA to help veterans request and cast absentee ballots, and would open VA facilities to non-partisan groups and election officials, so that they could provide veterans with information on registration and voting. All these services will go a long way to ensuring that veterans are able to exercise their most fundamental rights as citizens in our democracy: the right to vote.

In a year that has seen extraordinary levels of political participation — with unprecedented numbers of citizens demonstrating their desire to vote for the first time<sup>1</sup> — it is crucial to eliminate unnecessary barriers to registration. Only by doing so will it be possible to ensure that every eligible citizen who wants to vote can vote.

Ensuring access to registration and voting is especially important for the veterans served by the VA. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have fought for our democracy, and risked their lives, around the globe. For them, voting must be made easier, not harder. They have done their duty and served their country with valor, and now it is time for our country to fulfill its duty to them and honor their service. By making sure they have ready access to the registration rolls and the ballot, this legislation will make sure that their voices are heard.

The bill would let the VA fulfill its promise — to serve “as a single, comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served our nation”<sup>2</sup> — and would uphold the VA’s patients’ rights rule, which expressly protects “the right to register and vote.”<sup>3</sup> We urge the Congress to take immediate action to pass this legislation. Our veterans deserve no less.

Very truly yours,



J. Adam Skaggs  
Counsel, Democracy Program



Wendy Weiser  
Deputy Director, Democracy Program

cc:

Senator Robert C. Byrd  
Senator Ted Stevens  
Senator Daniel K. Inouye  
Senator Mitch McConnell  
Senator Christopher J. Dodd  
Senator Thad Cochran  
Senator Charles E Schumer  
Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson  
Senator Richard J. Durbin  
Senator C. Saxby Chambliss  
Senator E. Benjamin Nelson  
Senator Chuck Hagel

Senator Harry Reid  
Senator Lamar Alexander  
Senator Patty Murray  
Senator John Ensign  
Senator Mark L. Pryor

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Mike Baker, *More than 3.5 Million New Voters, AP Survey Finds*, Associated Press Online, May 6, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.va.gov/about\\_va/mission.asp](http://www.va.gov/about_va/mission.asp).

<sup>3</sup> 38 C.F.R. § 17.33(a)(4)(iv).