

# Official Statement

## OF THE BOARD OF BISHOPS OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH REGARDING THE IMMEDIATE NECESSITY OF PASSING VOTING RIGHTS LEGISLATION

On Monday January 17th our nation will once again commemorate the life, the legacy, and lingering work to be completed of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Someone has correctly stated that MLK's Birthday should not just be a "day off, it must be a day on!" The Board of Bishops wholeheartedly agrees with this affirmation.

Our work as a nation to realize true justice is extensive, including education, economic, and police reform; however, there is no singular issue more urgent than protecting and advancing voting reforms. Dr. King said, "Voting is the foundation stone for political action." And while the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church does not engage in partisan political activities, our members recognize that voting is at the heart of democracy and human rights. For us, it is a moral issue that affirms the divine value of every person and their cherished right to fully participate in the democratic process.

**Voting Rights Matter!** On this Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2022, there are two pieces of voting rights legislation that have recently been merged into one bill that the House of Representatives passed on Thursday. We, the members of the AME Zion church, strongly believe this legislation must be passed by the US Senate and signed into law by the president of the United States of America, Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

We call upon the Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer, Senate Minority Leader Mitchell McConnell, III, and all the members of the United States Senate to pass the combined Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (the "John Lewis Act"). As John Lewis so eloquently stated, "The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we

have in a democracy." As U.S. Senator Raphael Warnock said, "The Freedom to Vote Act puts the fire out in this 911 state of emergency in our democracy . . . The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act is about building a fire station for future fires." (Carl Hulse, The NY Times, November 3, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/NYTimesVotingRights>)

**The members of the AME Zion Church support key provisions of the Freedom to Vote Act!** It "set[s] new voting standards meant to counter efforts around the country to impose voting restrictions that . . . limit voting in minority communities." (Carl Hulse, The NY Times) The Freedom to Vote Act would provide equal access to voting for all Americans, stop partisan gerrymandering, and limit the influence of dark money, according to the League of Women Voters of the US.

**The members of the AME Zion Church support key provisions of the John Lewis Act!** This Act is necessary to restore parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that were invalidated in 2013 by the U.S. Supreme Court. The John Lewis Act would restore the requirement that "jurisdictions with a history of discrimination win prior approval – or preclearance – from the Justice Department or federal courts in Washington before changing their voting rules." (Carl Hulse, The NY Times)

**The members of the AME Zion Church support changes to the filibuster rules in the U.S. Senate!** We support changes to the filibuster rules as necessary to pass the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Act! The filibuster rules are relics of the past and cannot be used like a dam to hold back justice from rolling down like mighty waters and righteous like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24)

As Dr. King said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

### We refuse to be silent,

Bishop Kenneth Monroe,  
Senior Bishop and President of the Board of Bishops  
Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr.  
Bishop Dennis V. Proctor  
Bishop Mildred B. Hines  
Bishop W. Darin Moore  
Bishop Seth O. Lartey

Bishop Michael A. Frencher, Sr.  
Bishop George D. Crenshaw  
Bishop Hilliard Dogbe  
Bishop Uduak Effiong  
Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr.  
Bishop Eric Leake  
Bishop Joseph Johnson, Retired

Bishop Marshall H. Strickland, Retired  
Bishop Nathaniel Jarrett, Jr., Retired  
Bishop George W.C. Walker, Sr., Retired  
Bishop Samuel Chuka Ekemam, Sr., Retired  
Bishop Warren Matthew Brown, Retired  
Bishop George Edward Battle, Jr., Retired

DONE THIS THE 15TH DAY OF JANUARY, 2022