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March 12, 2021

Senator Todd Young
185 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Young,

We are writing today to urge you to support and make the *For the People Act (SR.1)* a top priority during the 117th Congressional Session. The cornerstone of any commendable democracy is a fair and accessible election process, and we believe that the current United States' voting system and laws are not yet the instruments of an exceptional democracy, but that they have the potential to be. *The For the People Act* promises to revitalize our democracy by providing more accessibility and protection to the voting process, dismantling systemic voter suppression tactics, implementing strict campaign finance reforms, and providing the funding to support state and local government's efforts to work toward a more inclusive and accessible democratic process. The bill addresses many flaws deeply rooted in our electoral system which have plagued recent elections.

Out of the many electoral system flaws that *SR 1* would work to remedy, voter registration and engagement is the most overarching topic. Twenty percent of U.S. citizens who are eligible to vote are not registered, and only 66 percent of eligible voters actually cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential election.^{1,2} The reasons for these statistics are numerous, but it is fair to say the complexity and lack of information surrounding voter registration and election processes is a contributing factor.³ More than 60 percent of eligible U.S. citizens have never been asked to register to vote, and without any guidance or direction, the registration process can be confusing for many. Indeed, during our numerous voter registration efforts at Wagner College we have learned from our peers that the deadlines are "never made clear enough" and that students "had

¹ The Pew Charitable Trust. *Why Are Millions of Citizens Not Registered to Vote*. (2017).

https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2017/06/ei_why_are_millions_of_citizens_not_registered_to_vote.pdf

² Michael P. McDonald, "2020 November General Election Turnout Rates," last modified December 7, 2020, <http://www.electproject.org/2020g>

³ Sarah Maguire. *Why is it so hard for so many Americans to vote?* (September 7, 2020, Macquarie University – The Lighthouse). <https://lighthouse.mq.edu.au/article/please-explain/september-2020/Why-is-it-so-hard-for-so-many-Americans-to-vote>

to register multiple times before the state accepted (their) application.” Even after eligible U.S. citizens complete registration paperwork, it is estimated that one out of every eight registrations is invalid or significantly inaccurate.⁴ Once the registration process is finished and confirmed, some voters may still find themselves unable to vote because their registration is revoked for minor discrepancies or a simple address change.⁵ One of us worked as a poll worker in our hometown and can attest that he watched numerous voters be turned away on election day because they believed they were registered to vote and had been purged from the voter roll without their knowledge; other people showed up unaware that certain states require that eligible U.S. citizens must register to vote prior to an election to cast a ballot. It is heartbreaking to watch people get turned away from the polls, especially when they are would-be first time voters who did not have access to resources and information they needed to properly register and subsequently cast a ballot.

The *For the People Act* provides a variety of solutions to the problems previously mentioned. First, the bill calls for automatic voter registration, which would add millions of voters to the rolls and bypass the hardship and confusion brought about by the current registration process. The 19 states and the District of Columbia which have implemented automatic voter registration have seen rises in registrations and turnouts across the board.⁶ In addition to automatic voter registration, the *For the People Act* proposes national same day voter registration, which would account for eligible voters who have not interacted with government agencies or voters who needed to update their information on the day of the election. These two policies alone would solve almost every problem that one of us encountered with potential voters while working the polls.

The *For the People Act* would also make great strides in limiting and reversing voter suppression tactics utilized in many levels of government. It proposes a solution to restore overturned elements of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* using the *Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2019*, or *H.R. 4*, which would require states to get federal approval to implement restrictive voter rights laws, amongst other voter protection measures.⁷ When this section (Section 5) of the *Voting Rights Act* was in place, the law stopped 86 discriminatory state voting laws from being enacted,

⁴ The Pew Charitable Trust. *Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient. Evidence That America's Voter Registration System Needs an Upgrade.* (February 14, 2012). <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2012/02/14/inaccurate-costly-and-inefficient-evidence-that-americas-voter-registration-system-needs-an-upgrade>

⁵ R. Michael Alvarez, Stephen Ansolabehere, Adam Berinsky, Gabriel Lenz, Charles Stewart III, and Thad Hall. *2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections: Final Report.* (2009). https://elections.delaware.gov/pdfs/SPAE_2008.pdf

⁶ Rob Griffin, Paul Gronke, Tova Wang, and Liz Kennedy. *Who Votes With Automatic Voter Registration? Impact Analysis of Oregon's First-in-the-Nation Program.* (June 7, 2017). Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/06/07/433677/votes-automatic-voter-registration/>

⁷ Brennan Center for Justice. *New Voting Restrictions in America.* (October 1, 2019). <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-voting-restrictions-america>

as well as over a hundred more which were withdrawn as soon as they were flagged by the justice department.⁸ When the Section 5 of the *Voting Rights Act* was repealed in 2013, the federal government no longer had the ability to restrict discriminatory laws. Recently passed voter registration laws in many states are needlessly strict, and are sometimes blatantly created to suppress certain groups. For example, the state of North Dakota enacted a law in 2013 which required an address for voter registration. This effectively disenfranchised North Dakota's Native American citizens who make up 5 percent of the state's population and many do not have a government address, the same applied to many of the state's residents who are unhoused/homeless.⁹ An agreement with the state was not reached until April of 2020, effectively suppressing the Native American vote for nearly seven years, not to mention the decades of voter suppression endured by the Native populations in previous decades. The implementation of federal oversight on voting laws would help reduce or eliminate practices that disenfranchise voters, especially those in minority groups who have been proven to be affected the most by voter suppression tactics.¹⁰

Another element of voter suppression and disenfranchisement the *For The People Act* would address is the restoration of voting rights for U.S. citizens with past convictions. Restrictive state laws currently prohibit over 4.5 million incarcerated or previously incarcerated people from casting a ballot.¹¹ These laws that ban incarcerated citizens from voting are undoubtedly rooted in the racism of the Jim Crow era, and still effectively disenfranchise Black people disproportionately. It is partially due to these laws that 1 in 13 voting-age Black U.S. citizens could not vote in 2016.¹² The *For the People Act* plans to remedy this inequity by allowing anyone who served their prison sentence is able to vote. In 2018, nearly two-thirds of Florida voters supported a constitutional amendment that would restore the right to vote to all felons who completed their parole or probation periods, excluding those convicted of murder or sexual offenses. However, the Legislator added stipulations (e.g. requiring fines) which resulted in less than ten percent of newly eligible voters to register to vote.¹³ This does not reflect the will of the

⁸ Tomas Lopez. "*Shelby County*": *One Year Later*. (June 24, 2014. Brennan Center for Justice.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/shelby-county-one-year-later>

⁹ North American Rights Fund. *North Dakota Agrees to Court-Ordered Relief Easing Voter ID Laws for Native Americans on Reservations*. (April 24, 2020). <https://www.narf.org/nd-voting-rights/>

¹⁰ American Civil Liberties Union. *Fighting Voter Suppression*. (nd). <https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights/fighting-voter-suppression>

¹¹ Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, and Sarah Shannon. *6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016*. (October 06, 2016). The Sentencing Project.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/6-million-lost-voters-state-level-estimates-felony-disenfranchisement-2016/>

¹² Wendy R. Weiser, Daniel I. Weiner, and Dominique Erney. *Congress Must Pass the "For the People Act"*. (January 21, 2021) Brennan Center for Justice. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/congress-must-pass-people-act#footnote44_z2ntjgj

¹³ Lawrence Mower and Langston Taylor. *In Florida, the Gutting of a Landmark Law Leaves Few Felons Likely to Vote*. (October 7, 2020). ProPublica. <https://www.propublica.org/article/in-florida-the-gutting-of-a-landmark-law-leaves-few-felons-likely-to-vote>

American people in Florida who overwhelmingly support restoring voting rights to the formerly incarcerated.¹⁴

Finally, the *For The People Act* contains a clause that demands colleges and universities appoint a “campus vote coordinator” to take the lead on voter registration and education initiatives at said establishments.¹⁵ Although the Higher Education Act already requires colleges to make a “good faith effort” to distribute voter registration forms, a 2010 study found that just sending a registration form without any additional support or resources did little to increase voter registration.¹⁶ As students who have founded and run a voter education organization at Wagner College, we know firsthand that many students need additional support, resources, and reminders to successfully register and cast a ballot in an election. From registering to vote, to understanding obscure absentee ballot processes, the task of aiding students in participating in democratic processes often falls upon a small number of students, professors, and/or staff who find themselves overcommitted, underfunded, and often not supported. Requiring higher education entities to designate someone who oversees campus voter registration along with the new opportunity for both private and public institutions to apply for grants to be used in these efforts would have an incredible impact on student voter turnout; especially since the youth vote continues to lag behind that of all other age groups.

We hope the information in this letter has provided support as to why we hope that you should support and make the *For The People Act* a top priority during the current congressional session. At the end of the day, this Act is imperative for modernizing our democracy, and ensuring equity in the voting process for your constituents and ALL people living in the U.S., particularly eligible U.S. citizen voters.

Thank you for your time,

Andrew Kolar
Seong Gillespie

¹⁴ Brennan Center for Justice. *Voting Rights Restoration Efforts in Florida*. (September 11, 2020).

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-rights-restoration-efforts-florida>

¹⁵ Jeremy Bauer-Wolf. *Knocking Down Barriers for Student Voting*. (March 20, 2019).

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/03/20/house-democrats-election-bill-makes-it-easier-college-students-vote-experts-say>

¹⁶ Bennion, Elizabeth A., and David W. Nickerson. “The cost of convenience: An experiment showing e-mail outreach decreases voter registration.” *Political Research Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2011): 858-869. doi: 10.1177/1065912910382304

Project Proposal

Overview:

The *For The People Act* is a piece of legislation that is necessary for the positive progression of our democracy, and it's reparations will be felt by all U.S. citizens. The bill focuses on adding more accessibility and protection to the voting process, and dismantling systemic voter suppression tactics. The bill also seeks to strengthen and increase the youth vote by requiring higher education institutions to designate a "campus vote coordinator" whose job would be to ensure access to voter registration documents and offer assistance throughout the processes.

Working with Wagner College's non-partisan voter engagement student organization WagnerVotes, we will organize programming on September 28, 2021 for National Voter Registration Day that encourages and aids students to register to vote. Programming will include voter registration tabling, giving away voting themed prizes and candy, and a guest presenter. All programming would be available to students studying in-person as well as virtually, and would partially fulfill the mission of what a Campus Vote Coordinator would be expected to accomplish. Since it is unlikely that the *For The People Act* will both pass and have its provisions, such as the campus coordinator, implemented by next fall, we want to create an event that will launch these initiatives into the forefront of our institution's civic engagement initiatives. Our non-partisan voter education organization WagnerVotes has already completed several successful voter registration drives over the past couple of years, and has directed over 400 students to register or request an absentee ballot on our partner's website (Turbovote.org), putting Wagner College in the Top 20 of all campuses in the U.S. that use TurboVote.

Goals:

Our main goals for the project are to get as many Wagner students registered to vote as possible, as well as educate students on how to cast a ballot via voting by mail or in person. After stopping by one of our events, students should be registered to vote if eligible, know what method of voting they are going to utilize, feel comfortable in their knowledge of filling out a ballot, and have an understanding of what they need to bring to the polls or include in an absentee ballot. We ultimately also hope to create a ripple effect, as well-informed Wagner students then can assist their family members and friends who are not at Wagner to become (knowledgeable) voters.

Target Audience:

Our target audience is Wagner College students, especially first year students who have just turned 18 (or are about to do so, since some states, including New York allow voter pre-registration for U.S. citizens as young as 16. The passing of the *For The People Act* and automatic voter registration would greatly aid in our goal of getting all eligible students registered to vote, but it is always important to double check your voter registration, and that is what we will be advocating for those who believe they are already registered to vote. We will

also make sure to remind out-of-state, or other students far from their registered address, that they will have to vote absentee and explain that process.

Activities:

We plan to hold a series of events on September 28, 2021 for National Voter Registration Day. The main programming would be a table that we would place either inside or directly outside of our student union that would have trained volunteers to help students register to vote, check their registration, request an absentee ballot, fill out a sample ballot, and answer any other questions that students might have about election processes. This table would have candy and baked goods to entice students (COVID-19 pandemic pending), and would also have laptops set up where students could register to vote right there. While this is happening, several other student volunteers would be driving around in a golf cart supplied by Wagner College’s Public Safety Department, and would be using a megaphone to announce voter registration day, state facts about voting, and tell people to visit our table in the Student Union. We have used this tactic in the past and it was a great way to get the campus excited and talking about registering to vote. Finally, in the evening we would have a guest speaker in person or via Zoom who would speak on a topic related to voting and democracy. We have previously had Wagner professors, members from the League of Women Voters, and a U.S. Congressman give insightful and engaging lectures and workshops, and we want to continue the conversations between students and professionals in the community.

Budget:

Item	Estimated Cost
Mailing supplies (for students who must mail in their voter registration application)	\$25
Food and candy for the table	\$100
Custom stickers “WagnerVotes”	\$150
“Vote” masks (COVID-19 pandemic pending)	\$175
Table decorations	\$50
Total	\$500