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## A Growing Movement For Voting Rights

As we celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day this year, the struggle he fought so hard to end was highlighted once again by his granddaughter, Yolanda Renee King, as she delivered a speech at the National Cathedral, this time through the lens of voting rights.

“We’ve got to be the generation that defends and extends our most fundamental freedom, the right to cast a vote that counts,” said the 13-year-old.

Her speech comes on the heels of a year when voting rights were steadily under attack. A total of 19 states passed laws restricting access to voting in the wake of the 2020 election, led by Republicans who, a year later, still refuse to accept the legitimacy of the election and, instead, continue to perpetuate the narrative that it was stolen from former President Donald Trump.

But it isn’t just the access to voting itself that is under attack, according to Wendy Weiser, Director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice.

“We have seen a multiprong attack on the foundations of our electoral system and democracy,” she told NPR in December 2021. “We are seeing now also legislation that would enable partisans literally to sabotage election results; in some states, new bills that give partisans power over election administration, allow them to interfere in it, criminalizing aspects of it, meddling in ways that are really jarring and new.”

In recent years, there have been attempts at reducing polling locations in majority-Black districts; shortened timeframes to request absentee ballots, making it more difficult to vote early; tighter restrictions on drive-through voting and voter assistance; limits on the use of ballot drop boxes; and even a ban on government entities providing citizens with unsolicited absentee ballot applications.

The adopted changes and many others that will find their way onto statehouse floors in 2022 are aimed at purging voter polls, creating entire agencies in service of voter-fraud witch hunts and stripping power away from election officials. In the wake of one of the most bizarre and vitriolic elections we may ever see, democracy itself is once again under attack.

Other members of the King family were hyper-focused this year on this issue for a reason. They urged lawmakers to pass the Voting Rights Act and use MLK Day as both a celebration and a rallying cry for activism, preserving the rights of thousands of people to participate in democracy.

“Today, my daughter is standing with fewer voting rights than the moment she was born,” Arndrea Waters King said. “Our very democracy is at stake.”

The year ahead will be fraught with many political battles and endless rhetoric. But if there is one ideal that cannot be lost, it is the power of the vote. In the words of Frederick Douglass: “The true and the easiest way is to make our government entirely consistent with itself and give every loyal citizen the elective franchise.”