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Attorney General Holder Must Re-commit to Protecting Voting Rights as New Voter Suppression Laws Sweep the Country

Austin, TX – The League of Women Voters of the United States and the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV) call on U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to re-commit the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) to protecting citizen voting rights in response to the numerous new voter suppression laws sweeping the country.

On Tuesday, December 13th in Austin, Texas, Mr. Holder will deliver a long awaited speech on voting rights and the role of the DOJ in enforcing those rights. The League urges Mr. Holder to denounce the voter suppression laws and recommit the DOJ to aggressively protect the voting rights of all U.S. citizens.

“DOJ’s record over the last three years has been mixed on voting rights enforcement,” according to Elisabeth MacNamara, president of the national League. “We applaud DOJ’s objections to the unfair Texas redistricting plan passed by the legislature and call on the Department to enforce the NVRA with the same vigor,” she said

“We are hopeful that Mr. Holder chose Texas to deliver his speech so that he can highlight the numerous issues that threaten to suppress the vote in next year’s elections. The various threats to voting rights in Texas alone include non-compliance with the National Voting Rights Act (NVRA), a new voter photo identification law, new restrictions on voter registration drives, and the discriminatory and politically motivated redistricting maps,” said Karen Nicholson, President of LWV of Texas.

Nationally, there has been an unprecedented increase in voter suppression laws. In 2011 alone, eight states have passed new restrictive photo ID laws, three states have passed laws requiring proof of citizenship as a prerequisite to voting, two states have made it more difficult for groups like the League of Women Voters to register eligible voters and five states have passed legislation that would eliminate or shorten the period of early voting. In addition, we could see new suppression laws passed in Michigan, Ohio, Minnesota, Virginia and Pennsylvania before the 2012 elections.

“This assault on voters is one of the greatest self-inflicted threats to our democracy in our lifetimes. These new laws threaten to silence the voices of those least heard and rarely listened to in this country – the poor, the elderly, racial and ethnic minorities, the young and person’s with disabilities,” MacNamara said.

The Department of Justice must act forcefully and without delay if they hope to ensure fair elections in 2012. The League of Women Voters stands ready to assist Mr. Holder in protecting the foundation of our democracy and will continue to work to ensure every eligible voter is allowed to vote and have their vote counted in 2012 and beyond,” MacNamara concluded.