A Statement on Voting Rights
Alliance of Baptists — Annual Meeting — April 8-9, 2016

To keep faith with our covenant, Alliance of Baptists members have pledged to: Foster relationships within the Alliance and with other people of faith . . . . Pursue justice with and for those who are oppressed.

Our ecumenical friends have asked us to stand for voting rights.

On April 15-18, 2016, over 1000 members of different denominations will gather for Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice (EAD), a movement of the ecumenical Christian community. EAD, which began in 2003, is grounded in biblical witness and shared traditions of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The Alliance is a member of EAD. The theme of the 2016 EAD conference is, “Lift Every Voice! – Racism, Class & Power”. As part of this year’s gathering, EAD attendees will advocate for the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (S. 1659/H.R. 2867) as a substantial legislative step to restoring and strengthening the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The right to vote is one of the most valuable, and many would argue, even sacred constitutional rights granted to most Americans. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) was enacted to insure no one, including federal, state or local governments, may in any way impede people from registering to vote or voting because of their race or ethnicity.

Since the passage of the VRA, there have been many attempts at passing discriminatory voting laws under the guise of reducing voter fraud and protecting voter integrity. For years, these efforts were largely stopped through a preclearance process for changes under the VRA. Preclearance process is an administrative procedure in which states and local jurisdictions covered under the VRA must submit all changes affecting voting and elections for preapproval by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division or the U.S. District Court for D.C.

On June 25, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in the case of Shelby v. Holder in which the Court did not invalidate the principle of preclearance, but it did decide that Section 4(b) of the VRA, which establishes the formula that is used to determine which states and jurisdictions must comply with preclearance, is antiquated and thus unconstitutional and can no longer be used.

Thus, although Section 5 survives, it is currently not being used and will not be used until Congress enacts a new formula for Section 4(b) to determine who should be covered by it. Until Congress acts to restore the preclearance process, voters are at risk of disenfranchisement through voting law changes.
Voting restrictions and laws like Voter ID laws have proven to disproportionately disenfranchise people of color, elderly citizens, young citizens, low-income citizens, and citizens with disabilities.

Many Alliance of Baptists’ congregational partners in North Carolina are engaged in the Moral Monday movement. The decision by the Supreme Court has serious consequences in North Carolina with voting rights. The North Carolina NAACP strongly supports the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (S. 1659 / H.R. 2867) and urges all of the provisions in this bill be enacted.

The Alliance of Baptists is a partner of EAD and we join others in declaring, “As people of faith, we hold the conviction that every voice matters and every voice must be heard. If we are to lift every voice, we must do all we can to ensure that no person is stripped of their right to vote.”

We - the Alliance of Baptists - affirm our partnership with Ecumenical Advocacy Days. We commit to joining with our ecumenical sisters and brothers in contacting our senators and members of the House of Representatives and advocating for the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (S. 1659/H.R. 2867), sponsored by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) as a substantial legislative step to restoring and strengthening the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA).

We – the Alliance of Baptists - will ask that Senators and Representatives 1) co-sponsor the bill and 2) push leadership to bring the bill to the floor for a vote in 2016.