



Protecting Black Collective Voting Power

A National Template

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Protecting Black Collective Voting Power

National Template

Purpose

This is a **national organizing and policy template** for Black communities and allied organizations seeking enforceable state-level protections against the cracking, packing, fragmentation, and dilution of Black collective voting power.

It is designed to be shared across states without requiring a full rewrite. The national framework remains stable. Each participating state could use this as a basis to complete a **State Adaptation Module** identifying its own law, targets, policy vehicle, affected communities, and enforcement gaps.

New York is used here solely as an illustrative application-not as a default model for every state.

1. The Condition We Intend to Change

Black communities are often connected by history, institutions, shared public needs, culture, neighborhood relationships, and collective civic life. Yet district lines can split those communities among multiple districts, reducing their ability to elect candidates of choice, influence public decisions, and hold public officials accountable. This practice is commonly known as **cracking**. It can operate alongside packing, retrogression, opaque mapmaking, and weak enforcement systems.

The campaign's central truth is: > **Black communities are not accidental collections of voters. States must not divide our communities politically for convenience, partisan advantage, incumbent protection, or unsupported technical claims.**

Federal voting-rights protections remain important, but the U.S. Supreme Court's April 29, 2026 decision in *Louisiana v. Callais* made federal vote-dilution litigation a more restrictive and uncertain path. That makes independent, enforceable state protections more urgent-not optional.

2. Campaign Objective

Win and enforce state-level protections that enable Black communities to:

1. **Prevent unjustified fragmentation** of documented Black Communities of Interest;
 2. **Identify and challenge vote dilution** before harmful maps govern elections;
 3. **Access maps, data, analysis, and public processes early enough to matter**;
 4. **Obtain timely remedies** when a state or local districting body weakens Black collective political voice;
- and

5. **Build durable community capacity** to define, document, map, validate, and defend their own communities between redistricting cycles.

3. The Core Protection Package

Each state team should pursue the parts of this package that close the most consequential local gap. A state may advance the package through legislation, agency rules, commission procedures, enforcement reforms, or a combination of these tools.

A. Anti-Dilution Protection

State law should prohibit districting practices that impair Black voters' practical opportunity to elect candidates of choice or meaningfully influence electoral outcomes. The standard should cover:

- cracking;
- packing;
- retrogression;
- discriminatory or unjustifiably harmful district-based systems;
- election-method changes that diminish Black political opportunity; and
- local as well as statewide districting systems where relevant.

B. Community of Interest Integrity Protection

A **Community of Interest** is a geographically connected population whose members share enduring social, cultural, historical, civic, economic, educational, environmental, transportation, public-service, or other material interests that benefit from unified representation.

For Black communities, relevant evidence may include:

- historically Black neighborhoods and settlement patterns;
- faith, civic, cultural, educational, and mutual-aid institutions;
- shared housing, transit, health, infrastructure, environmental, policing, and economic concerns;
- business corridors, schools, service areas, and neighborhood networks;
- common experiences of exclusion, displacement, discrimination, or underinvestment; and
- collective civic and representational interests.

A documented Community of Interest should not be materially divided unless the mapmaker publicly demonstrates that:

1. A specifically identified legal requirement makes the division necessary;
2. Reasonably available, less-disruptive alternatives were considered;
3. The selected map causes the least practicable disruption to the community; and
4. The division does not unlawfully diminish Black voters' political opportunity.

The following should **not** be sufficient reasons by themselves to split a documented community:

- partisan advantage;

- incumbent protection;
- administrative convenience;
- unsupported claims of compactness; or
- mapmaker preference where a less-disruptive alternative is available.

C. Community Definition and Defense Capacity

A right on paper is not enough. States should provide communities with a meaningful ability to use the protection. Required conditions include:

- accessible Community of Interest submission procedures;
- timely access to draft maps, shapefiles, demographic data, and relevant election information;
- public hearings before map decisions harden;
- mapping support and technical assistance that strengthens-but does not replace-community leadership;
- a requirement that mapmakers respond in writing to community submissions; and
- privacy safeguards for vulnerable residents and sensitive community information.

D. Written Community Integrity Findings

When a mapmaking body materially divides a documented Community of Interest, it should publish a written finding that identifies:

- the community affected;
- the evidence reviewed;
- the districts into which the community is divided;
- the legal necessity claimed;
- less-disruptive alternatives considered;
- the anticipated effect on representation; and
- why the adopted plan is the least harmful practicable option.

This requirement shifts the burden appropriately: communities should not be forced to discover harm after a map is adopted and then carry the entire burden of proving that the division was avoidable.

E. Timely Enforcement and Remedies

State protections must be usable before an election makes the harm difficult to correct. The campaign should seek:

- standing for directly affected voters and qualified community organizations;
- expedited administrative or judicial review;
- authority to halt or delay implementation of harmful maps where legally and practically appropriate;
- corrective remapping authority;
- enforcement authority for an appropriate public body where state law permits; and

- post-adoption monitoring to ensure that a legal win becomes real protection.

4. National Organizing Strategy

Build from community agency

The people directly affected must be the campaign's analysts, leaders, decision-makers, and public voice—not merely witnesses after technical decisions have been made. Each participating state should establish a **Community Leadership Table** with functional representation from directly affected Black residents and institutions, including neighborhood organizations, faith communities, youth, elders, tenant and homeowner groups, small businesses, civic organizations, labor, and other trusted community structures.

The table should establish clear authority for:

- approving state-specific demands;
- validating Community of Interest records;
- selecting demonstration communities;
- accepting or rejecting partial concessions;
- determining escalation or de-escalation; and
- protecting confidential information and participant safety.

Build Community of Interest records

For each demonstration community, organizers should:

1. Form a Community Definition Team;
2. Identify shared history, institutions, needs, and civic relationships;
3. Develop a community-validated geographic footprint;
4. Collect public evidence and lived community knowledge;
5. Compare the footprint with existing or proposed district lines;
6. Identify less-disruptive alternatives where possible;
7. Hold a public and internal validation process; and
8. Submit the record through the relevant legislative, commission, agency, or local-government process.

Community records should distinguish between verified public facts, resident experience, informed interpretation, and unresolved questions. The campaign should be honest about internal disagreement or boundary uncertainty rather than overstating consensus.

Build a statewide coalition by function

Each campaign needs the following functions, whether performed by one organization or many:

Function	Responsibility
Community leadership	Defines priorities, validates evidence, authorizes decisions
Policy and legal analysis	Tests statutory language, authority, and enforcement routes

Mapping and evidence	Supports COI documentation and map-impact analysis
Legislative engagement	Identifies and moves adoption targets and vehicles
Coalition outreach	Builds aligned support without hiding the campaign's purpose
Training and leadership development	Expands community capacity to defend COIs
Communications and accountability	Maintains a truthful public narrative and documents institutional response

5. State Adaptation Module

Every state team should complete a short companion module before entering formal engagement.

Required state findings

1. **Legal baseline:** What voting-rights laws, redistricting criteria, election rules, administrative procedures, and court decisions already apply?
2. **Protection gap:** What is missing-anti-dilution coverage, COI integrity, transparency, early review, standing, remedy timing, enforcement authority, or local-map coverage?
3. **Adoption target:** Which legislature, committee, governor, commission, agency, or local body can close the gap?
4. **Implementation target:** Who must apply, monitor, enforce, or review the protection?
5. **Viable vehicle:** Is there a bill, rulemaking, commission procedure, enforcement action, or local ordinance that can produce an enforceable gain?
6. **Community leadership base:** Which Black communities and institutions will lead the evidence and accountability work?
7. **Victory standard:** What must be adopted, implemented, and enforceable before the state can claim success?

State-demand test

A state proposal is strong when it can answer "yes" to these questions:

- Does it prevent or deter fragmentation **before** elections?
- Does it require a mapmaker to explain a material community split?
- Does it give communities meaningful access to data, maps, and participation?
- Does it provide a timely remedy?
- Does it cover the institutions where Black voting power is most at risk?

6. New York: Illustrative First Application

New York is a **strengthen-and-enforce** state. Its John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York already prohibits boards of elections and political subdivisions from using election methods-including district-based systems-that impair protected-class voters' ability to elect candidates of choice or influence outcomes because of vote dilution. The law also provides expedited proceedings and possible remedies for violations.

New York also has a state preclearance structure for covered voting policies and covered entities, administered through the Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau or a designated court.

New York's initial campaign posture:

> Defend, enforce, and strengthen New York's existing voting-rights protections so Black communities can define and defend their Communities of Interest and stop unjustified fragmentation before it weakens their collective voting power.

As of August 7, 2026, Senate bill S10612 and Assembly companion A11592 are active proposals to amend implementation provisions of the New York Voting Rights Act; S10612 is in the Senate Rules Committee. They are potential legislative openings to assess and strengthen, not presumed complete solutions or automatic campaign vehicles.

New York organizers should determine whether the most urgent gap is:

- a binding COI integrity standard;
- earlier public map access;
- required written findings for community splits;
- stronger local-districting coverage;
- faster remedies;
- enforcement capacity; or
- community mapping and submission capacity.

7. Public Narrative and Accountability Claim

Core frame

> Black communities are not accidental collections of voters. We are connected by history, institutions, shared public needs, and collective civic life. The State must not divide our communities politically without proving necessity, showing less-disruptive alternatives, and providing a meaningful way to stop the harm.

Narrative discipline

Organizers should:

- name cracking, packing, dilution, and responsible institutions when evidence supports the claim;
- explain the real consequence of fragmentation: reduced representation, weaker accountability, and divided community voice;
- avoid claiming that every district split is unlawful or intentionally discriminatory without evidence;
- reject efforts to hide political choices behind technical language;
- connect community self-interest-keeping neighborhoods and institutions represented-to the collective public good; and

- remain clear that the goal is not partisan advantage or racial quotas, but enforceable protection against unjustified fragmentation and diminished political opportunity.

8. Escalation Thresholds and Levels

Recommended current level: Level 0 - Observe and Prepare

The national template is complete. State teams should now establish governance, complete the State Adaptation Module, identify willing demonstration communities, build validated COI records, and select a policy or administrative vehicle. Escalation is **evidence-based and condition-based**. It does not occur merely because time passes.

Level	Purpose	Activation threshold	Authorized actions	Hold / pause / rollback condition
0 - Observe and Prepare	Build community leadership, evidence, state analysis, and readiness	Core evidence, target, or governance is incomplete	Organize, train, document, validate, map	Hold until demand and community record are sufficient
1 - Direct Engagement	Test whether the accountable target will act voluntarily	State demand, target, and COI evidence are ready	Meetings, written requests, formal submissions, presentations	Hold if target provides a specific and verifiable pathway to action
2 - Formal Accountability	Create an official record and require specific responses	Delay, vague commitment, narrowed proposal, or need for formal record	Hearings, public comments, filings, legislative or agency procedures	Hold if enforceable language or implementation commitments are moving
3 - Public Pressure	Increase public and political cost of inaction	Formal channels fail, conceal key choices, or produce inadequate movement	Community forums, public education, coalition mobilization, lawful nonviolent action	De-escalate if a real, monitorable agreement creates an enforceable path
4 - Coordinated Leverage	Secure a decision through concentrated organized power	Continued refusal, serious weakening of proposal, closing decision window, or harmful map action	Coordinated constituent, governance, administrative, legal, and political leverage	Hold upon a binding, enforceable, monitorable commitment
5 - Sustained High-Pressure Action	Prevent or correct serious imminent harm after lower levels fail	Verified urgent harm, failed lower levels, capacity and safety review, leadership authorization	Strongest lawful, disciplined, nonviolent pressure within coalition capacity	Pause if risk exceeds capacity, support weakens, or enforceable resolution emerges

Human decision authority

A higher-risk escalation level may be recommended by the campaign, but it must be authorized by the **Community Leadership Table** after confirming:

1. The threshold is met;
2. The evidence is sufficient;
3. The action has a defined purpose;
4. The coalition has capacity and safeguards; and
5. The action is lawful, disciplined, nonviolent, and consistent with community legitimacy.

9. Measures of Progress and Victory

Progress indicators

- Community Leadership Table is functioning;
- State Adaptation Module is complete;
- Community Definition Teams are trained;
- COI records are community validated;
- Coalition partners have accepted clear roles;
- Target institutions have received the demand;
- Public and official records include community evidence.

Policy movement indicators

- A bill, rule, procedure, or enforcement initiative is introduced;
- The proposal includes anti-dilution, COI, transparency, written-finding, standing, and remedy protections;
- Decision-makers make specific public commitments;
- The proposal advances through a recognized decision pathway.

Implementation indicators

- Maps, data, and analysis are released early enough for meaningful review;
- Community submissions receive written responses;
- Community Integrity Findings are published when communities are split;
- Expedited review and corrective mechanisms are usable;
- Mapmakers document less-disruptive alternatives.

Victory ladder

1. **Organizing progress:** Community leadership, evidence, and coalition capacity exist.
2. **Initial concession:** The target agrees to a concrete process, sponsorship, amendment, or enforceable partial protection.
3. **Policy victory:** A binding protection is enacted or formally adopted.

4. **Implementation victory:** Communities can actually access data, participate, obtain findings, and use remedies.
5. **Representation victory:** Black communities prevent or correct unjustified fragmentation before it diminishes their collective voting power.

10. MPoWER Philosophy Alignment

This campaign is grounded in **truth, community agency, organized power, disciplined action, accountability, and adaptation.**

- **Truth without concealment:** The campaign openly names the harm of cracking and vote dilution while distinguishing verified facts from allegations or assumptions.
- **Community agency:** Black communities lead the definition, validation, and defense of their own Communities of Interest.
- **Organized power:** The strategy builds trained leadership, durable evidence, coalition capacity, and statewide leverage rather than relying only on litigation or technical experts.
- **Strategic targeting:** The campaign identifies the institutions that can enact, implement, enforce, or block protections.
- **Narrative accountability:** Mapmakers and public officials must explain decisions that divide documented communities.
- **Disciplined nonviolent action:** Pressure increases only when evidence, readiness, and community decision authority support it.
- **Resilience and adaptation:** The campaign preserves its objective while changing tactics when a state's law, vehicle, institutional response, or coalition conditions require adjustment.

Immediate Organizer Action

At the current Level 0 posture, each state team should:

1. Convene or confirm its Community Leadership Table;
2. Complete the State Adaptation Module;
3. Identify community-led demonstration sites through relationship-building and consent;
4. Form Community Definition Teams;
5. Build and validate at least one COI evidence record;
6. Select the strongest available statutory, administrative, procedural, or enforcement vehicle; and
7. Prepare to enter Level 1 direct engagement with the accountable state target.

New York State Adaptation Module

Initial Execution Posture

1. New York's Current Starting Point

New York Election Law 17-206 already prohibits boards of elections and political subdivisions from using an election method-including district-based systems-that impairs protected-class voters' ability to elect candidates of choice or influence election outcomes because of vote dilution.

New York also has a preclearance structure for certain covered voting policies and covered entities. Senate bill **S10612**, sponsored by Senator Zellnor Myrie, and Assembly companion **A11592** would amend several provisions of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York, including vote-dilution procedures, board-of-elections liability, remedies, and preclearance administration. As of **August 7, 2026**, S10612 is in the Senate Rules Committee and A11592 is in the Assembly Election Law Committee.

Strategic conclusion:

These bills are a useful legislative opening, but they do not by themselves establish the campaign's full Community of Interest integrity standard. The New York campaign should therefore organize around a clear question:

> Will New York strengthen its existing voting-rights framework so Black communities can document their Communities of Interest, receive timely map information, and stop unjustified fragmentation before it weakens representation?

2. New York's Preliminary Protection Gap

The initial state module identifies four likely gaps to test and document:

1. Binding COI integrity standard

New York needs a more operational standard preventing unnecessary division of documented Black Communities of Interest.

2. Written justification requirement

Where a map divides a documented community, the responsible body should have to publish the necessity claimed, alternatives considered, and representational impact.

3. Usable community-definition process

Communities need accessible mapping support, early data access, a submission channel, and a required written institutional response.

4. Fast, practical remedy pathway

Existing rights must be usable early enough to prevent harm-not merely recognize dilution after an election is underway or complete.

3. Immediate New York Organizer Sequence

Step 1 - Establish the New York Community Leadership Table

Build a New York leadership body rooted in Black communities and institutions that will make campaign decisions-not simply provide testimony.

Required functions:

- community leadership and governance;
- policy and legal review;
- mapping and COI evidence;
- legislative engagement;
- coalition outreach;
- training and leadership development;
- public narrative and accountability.

Completion condition:

A community-accountable body can approve the New York demand, validate COI records, and authorize escalation decisions.

Step 2 - Select Demonstration Communities Through Consent

Identify the first Black communities, localities, or neighborhoods that want to participate in defining and defending a Community of Interest. Selection should be based on:

- local willingness to lead;
- identifiable shared history, institutions, and public needs;
- a plausible current or foreseeable districting risk;
- community capacity to validate a record; and
- value as a demonstration for other New York communities.**Do not select sites solely because outside observers consider them strategically convenient.** The community must want to lead the work and control its definition.

Completion condition:

At least one community agrees to form a Community Definition Team.

Step 3 - Build the First Community of Interest Record

The Community Definition Team should document:

- historical Black settlement, continuity, displacement, and neighborhood relationships;
- faith, civic, cultural, educational, and mutual-aid institutions;
- shared housing, transit, health, environmental, infrastructure, and public-safety concerns;
- common service areas, schools, commercial corridors, and civic networks;
- current or prior district boundaries that divide the community; and

- feasible less-disruptive alternatives, where relevant.

The record should distinguish:

- **verified public evidence;**
- **community testimony and lived experience;**
- **informed interpretation;** and
- **unresolved boundary questions.**

Completion condition:

The community has a validated, public-facing COI record that can be used in legislative advocacy, administrative proceedings, and future map-review processes.

Step 4 - Define the New York Legislative Ask

The initial New York ask should be framed as a **strengthening package**, not merely general support for existing law:

> Amend and implement New York voting-rights and redistricting protections so that documented Black Communities of Interest cannot be materially divided without a public necessity finding, review of less-disruptive alternatives, meaningful community participation, and a timely remedy.

The policy team should test whether S10612/A11592 can be amended or used as a vehicle for parts of this package. Their current text addresses NYVRA implementation and enforcement matters, but the campaign should not represent them as already creating a comprehensive anti-cracking or COI-integrity standard.

Completion condition:

The New York table adopts one clear primary demand and identifies whether the immediate route is bill amendment, separate legislation, administrative action, or a combined strategy.

Step 5 - Enter Direct Engagement Only When the Record Is Ready

Move to **Level 1 - Direct Engagement** once the campaign has:

- a functioning Community Leadership Table;
- a defined New York protection gap;
- at least one community-validated COI record;
- a plain-language legislative ask; and
- named adoption and implementation targets.

The first direct-engagement demand should require a **documented response** addressing:

1. protection against vote dilution and unjustified community fragmentation;
2. Community of Interest documentation and submission procedures;
3. written findings when a documented community is divided;
4. early public access to maps and relevant data; and

5. expedited, enforceable remedies.

4. Current Campaign Level and Advancement Trigger

Current level:

Level 0 - Observe and Prepare

Advance to Level 1 only when:

New York organizers can present a community-led, evidence-based demand to the responsible institutional target. **Do not advance merely because a bill exists or because a hearing becomes available.** The campaign's leverage comes from connecting a specific policy gap to a documented community that is prepared to lead, speak, and hold decision-makers accountable.

5. Immediate Organizer Priority

The first real-world organizing task is therefore: > **Build the New York Community Leadership Table and secure consent from one or more Black communities to begin the Community of Interest Definition and Defense process.**

That action converts the national framework from a strong policy concept into organized community power capable of shaping New York's legal and legislative choices.