



2014 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

NATIONAL ACTION NETWORK

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INTRODUCTION

National Action Network (NAN), founded in 1991 by Reverend Al Sharpton, works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender.

The Legislative Agenda of the National Action Network focuses on key legislation before Congress and policies that impact our communities, implemented by the Administration, such as criminal justice, gun violence, voting rights, education, healthcare, jobs and the economy among others.

The mission of the Washington D.C. Bureau of NAN is to influence and advocate for federal public policy that reflects the needs and interests of the communities we serve based on the action agenda set forth by our National Board of Directors and senior leadership.

Our legislative priorities are the issues, public policies and action items determined at our National Convention.

We hope our NAN Chapters and stakeholders will use this Legislative Agenda as a tool to advocate and educate their members of Congress on legislation that is critically important to African American communities across the country. Additionally, this tool will help direct their state and local policy setting advocacy work.



2014 Legislative Priorities for NAN:

PRIORITY 1: VOTING RIGHTS:

Restrictive voting laws, including changes in voting eligibility and polling sites, eliminating or reducing early voting periods and requirements for new types of photo identification, continue to be major road blocks. This affects voters in securing access to a free and fair election process. These issues are further compounded by the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling to strip key provisions from the Voting Rights Act in the case of *Shelby County vs. Holder*. There is much work to be done to restore access to the ballot box and in particular to fix these changes Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act.

In the true civil rights tradition, NAN Chapters are on the ground protecting right citizens to vote. NAN members have registered voters, monitored elections, marched and rallied in states across the country including states like Alabama, Texas, Florida, and North Carolina. National Action Network remains vigilant in it's commitment to secure the unfettered right to vote for all Americans. Now more than ever, national, state and local elections are the target of voting rights rollbacks. We must be the guardians of the vote for which our ancestors died to obtain.

In 2014 NAN will:

- Support federal and state legislation that focuses on restoring voting rights protection.
- Meet with Members of Congress to educate and advocate for their support for new voting rights legislation.
- NAN will continue to partner with Voting Rights coalitions and grassroots organizations, working to protect and restore the right to vote.
- Provide support for voting rights hearings in NAN cities by
 - Providing witnesses to testify
 - Providing written testimony
 - Providing chapter participation and engagement on voting rights through field operations
- Educate NAN chapters and their communities on voting rights issues threaten to dilute our vote locally and nationally.



PRIORITY 2: Jobs and the Economy:

Jobs

In 1963, the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom highlighted the need to put Americans to work. More than fifty years after the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington, jobs continue to be a priority. NAN chapters have rallied their local officials to increase the federal minimum wage to levels that would sustain a decent livable wage above the poverty level.

Over the last 44 months, 7.4 million private sector jobs have been added to the economy. However, over the same period, federal, state and local government jobs have declined. Many of these jobs were held by African Americans and Latinos. Additionally, while unemployment has decreased, we are seeing more and more American families falling into poverty. The unemployment rate for African Americans still at 10.7% and 7.8% for Latinos. Yet, the national federal minimum wage stands at just \$7.85 per hour. This does not allow for the average family of four to rise above the poverty level. NAN is working with Congress to pass S. 460 and H.R. 1010 The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013, which would raise the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 by 2016. These bills will provide families with livable wages and will keep pace with the current costs of living. It will also provide an estimated 140,000 new full time jobs. Additionally, President Obama signed an Executive Order to ensure federal contract workers will receive \$10.10 per hour.

The National Budget and the Economy:

The last time Congress passed a full and comprehensive budget was in 1997. Since that time the federal government has operated on Continuing Resolutions and stop-gap spending measures to keep the government running. This is unprecedented. In 2012 Congress passed the ***American Taxpayer Relief Act of 8672***, which called for sweeping cuts to all Federal agency budgets, and took affect in March of 2013. This legislation, known as Sequestration, negatively affected every aspect of American Life. Every federal agency was mandated to reduce their budget spending by about 20% or more. This caused federal parks to close, staff were furloughed; and programs that have assisted millions of Americans were cut. Programs such as The Head Start Program caused as many as 19,000 low-income children to lose access to comprehensive education, nutritious meals, and medical screenings for children. Additionally, more than 20 programs across 11 states did not get the annual grant they had been scheduled to receive. Since the end of the sequestration, many of the federal programs were refunded but not at the pervious level.

The Government shutdown of October 2013, cost the 800,000 federal employees three weeks of income. It also affected those industries associated with them. This would bring the total number of people affected by the shutdown to be almost 1.5 million.



Had the shutdown continued past October 16, 2013 it would have cost the country billions more. Nationwide, the economy stood to lose an estimated \$55 billion if the shutdown had lasted 3-4 weeks more. This piecemeal method of governance is forcing more families into poverty and more businesses into bankruptcy.

In 2014 NAN will:

- Support legislation to increase the Federal minimum wage to \$10.10/hour.
- Support legislation to end Sequestration budgets.
- Support legislation that will create sustainable jobs in all industries; specifically, in transportation, manufacturing, clean energy, and infrastructure expansion and maintenance.
- Support legislation that will provide investments in educational career opportunities.
- Work with small businesses to maintain or reduce their tax structure while enabling them to hire additional staff through the Small Business Hiring Tax Credit.
- Support legislation to increase year round job opportunities for youth between 16-24 years of age.
- Partner with the labor community to ensure that workers' rights are protected.

PRIORITY 3: Criminal Justice, Gun Violence and Public Safety:

Criminal Justice issues are the foundation of National Action Network's work. NAN continues to examine the criminal justice system on the whole and to speak out on issues that disproportionately affect communities of colors low socio-economic status. These issues include wrongful convictions, racial profiling, stand your ground laws, police brutality, and mandatory minimum sentencing. These issues can and do create undue burdens on our communities to provide safe havens for our families. It perpetuates the cycle of violence and broken family structure, robs citizens of "clean slate" opportunities upon release from prison. This often leads them back into the criminal justice system.

2013 was a year that many Americans will never forget, especially African Americans. Tragedy after tragedy, took the lives of young people in our communities. We witnessed the shocking and tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut where elementary school children were brutally gunned down. We witnessed a high school scholar and musician, who played in her high school band during the President's Inauguration, gunned down in front of her home. We were shocked at the fatal shooting of Jordan Davis over loud music. And we cannot forget the exoneration of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. Every day, all across the country too many Americans fall victim to gun violence. And African American are particularly are the victims. National Action Network will continue to agitate and advocate for a review of all gun and criminal justice laws in order to better monitor and limit the easy access to guns.



In 2014 NAN will:

- Support President Obama's policies to reduce gun violence.
- Challenge "Stand Your Ground Laws" across the country.
- Monitor Federal and local criminal justice legislation.
- Support legislation that provides safeguards such as background checks, mental health screenings; and seek to restrict guns sale to persons with a mental illness history or a criminal history.
- Support bans on high velocity, semi-automatic weapons.
- Provide testimony on Federal and local levels on unjust criminal justice and gun policies.
- Provide assistance to those re-entering society in finding opportunities for jobs, housing and overall financial stability.
- Work with local law enforcement to end racial profiling and racially targeted public policies that target African American communities.
- Reach out to organizations such as the National Rifle Association to develop fair and reasonable policies to reduce the amount of gun violence.
- Support legislation that provides more oversight at gun shows and interstate gun trafficking.

PRIORITY 4: IMMIGRATION REFORM:

National Action Network is committed to working with all stakeholders in developing immigration reform that does not punish undocumented immigrants who are living here as law abiding citizens; and who are working to help make a better life for themselves, their families and their communities. During the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington, NAN and our allies called for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

In 2014, NAN will:

- Support federal comprehensive immigration reform legislation that provides a pathway to citizenship.
- Continue to work with allied organizations, on comprehensive immigration reform .
- Continue to fight against state or federal legislation that allows law enforcement officials to racially profile individuals whom they believe are illegal immigrants.
- Work with State legislatures to pass fair comprehensive laws and resolutions related to immigration.
- Support Presidential Actions that will address immigration.



PRIORITY 5: EDUCATION:

National Action Network has identified education as the critical civil rights issue of the 21st century. NAN has partnered with liberals and conservatives alike to advance the agenda for improving educational opportunities for all students, and closing the achievement gap for minority and poor students.

National Action Network continues to promote activities that will build a high quality educational system that serves the needs of all students, especially those in urban communities. We will build bridges between policymakers and the classrooms by supporting innovations in the delivery of education. This will require creating dialogue between policymakers, community leaders, educators, parents, and the students. We also will examine those policies that negatively target African American students disproportionately such as the “Pre-K to prison pipeline”; and the high number of suspensions and expulsions of black and brown students.

In 2014 NAN will:

- Continue to work with the U.S. Department of Education, Congress and state legislators to address funding and equity disparities between schools throughout the nation.
- Work with state education agencies to ensure equitable implementation of the National Common Core Standards.
- Continue to work with Congress and state legislators to develop early childhood interventions, school readiness and access to high quality early childhood and pre K-12 education for students in urban communities.
- Work with the telecom industry to address student achievement gaps and especially the “digital divide” in many communities and schools that lack access to technology.
- Work to curtail the educational impact on children of color from low-income homes without computers or internet service.
- Continue to partner with Education for a Better America and other organizations to address college access and success for students across the country, particularly Black students who graduate at rates far lower than their white and Latino counterparts.



- Continue to work with Congress and the DOE on the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Additionally, develop federal and state requirements for a 21 century education, ensuring that it meets the needs of urban communities.
- Continue to work with allied groups as well as state and local governments and teacher's unions to increase teacher and leader effectiveness, and to ensure an equitable distribution of qualified personnel to meet the needs of all students.
- Work to ensure access to science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematic (STEAM) educational opportunities for African American Students on all education levels.
- Work on a collaborative call to action with allies and elected officials to address the racial disparities in the education of African American males.
- Support the President's newly launched initiative, My Brother's Keeper.
- Work with NAN Chapters, parents and local school boards to ensure that our children are receiving an excellent 21 century education.

PRIORITY 6: HEALTHCARE:

National Action Network is committed to protecting the fundamental right of access to quality healthcare. On March 23, 2010, President Obama signed the landmark legislation, The Affordable Care Act, putting in place comprehensive reforms that improve access to affordable health coverage for everyone; and protects consumers from abusive insurance company practices. In 2013, NAN worked with the White House, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Enroll America, as well as many other groups, to spread awareness of the Affordable Care Act. We helped to educate the uninsured about the new health coverage options, engaging our 75 plus chapters and their communities across the country. All NAN Chapters around the country sponsored ACA registration events to ensure that their communities were enrolled in a health plan by the March 31st deadline.

In 2014, National Action Network will:

- Continue to work with the White House, and HHS to provide access for the uninsured elderly, men, women, and families in our communities across the country.



- Work with our Chapters to educate their communities about preventive healthcare and nutritional wellness.
- Work to address the needs of mental health issues in our communities by working with allies.
- Work with Congress and state legislators to produce more comprehensive legislation that will address the numerous healthcare needs in our communities.
- Work with Health Care companies to address health and wellness for individuals and families in our communities.
- Work with telecom and tele-health companies to address the unique health care needs in our communities.

PRIORITY 7: TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

In 1996 President Clinton signed into law the Telecommunication Act of 1996. It was the first significant overhaul of the United States telecommunications law in more than sixty years, amending the Communications Act of 1934. The Act represented a major change in American telecommunication law, since it was the first time that the internet was included in broadcasting and spectrum allotment.

The significance of this Act meant that for the first time average Americans had access to the “Information Super Highway” also known as the Internet. However, with progress there sometimes come challenges. The challenge with this new innovation was to connect individuals and families to the internet, particularly in African American communities. Today connecting individuals and families to high speed internet, is the challenge. Telecommunication dominates every aspect of our lives from education, job search and healthcare. Providing African American and minority communities internet access is the primary step to closing the “digital divide”.

In 2014 NAN will:

- Work with the Administration to ensure that African American communities have access to broadband through the E-Rate program initiative.
- Ensure that schools and libraries in African American communities have access and are connected to the internet.
- Work with the telecommunication industry to secure software and hardware for students, particularly in elementary and high schools in minority communities.
- Support legislation on the federal and local levels that has budgetary oversight to increase broadband access.
- Work with healthcare and telecommunication organizations to provide e-healthcare access to African American individuals and families, including military families.



LEGISLATION TO WATCH

In this section we have identified a few bills that have been introduced that we think are worth watching and following because of the potential impact they could have on our communities.

PRIORITY 1 -VOTING RIGHTS:

S. 1945: Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014—to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to revise the criteria for determining which States and political subdivisions are subject to Section 4 of the Act. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

H.R. 3899 Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 -to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to revise the criteria for determining which States and political subdivisions are subject to Section 4 of the Act. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

PRIORITY 2—JOBS AND THE ECONOMY:

S. 460 - The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013—This vital legislation would increase the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 by 2015, in three steps of 95 cents each. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

S. 1716: BRIDGE Act - A bill to facilitate efficient investments and financing of infrastructure projects and new long-term job creation through the establishment of an Infrastructure Financing Authority. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL THIS BILL PASSED CONGRESS AND WAS SIGNED INTO LAW.**

S. 1712: Employee Rights Act—A bill to provide protections for workers with respect to their right to select or refrain from selecting representation by a labor organization. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

HR. 1010 - To The Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) to increase the Federal minimum wage. The bill would increase the Federal minimum wage to \$10.10 by 2016 in three steps of \$.95 each and provide automatic annual increases to account for inflation. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

PRIORITY 3—CRIMINAL JUSTICE and GUN VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

S. 649: Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013—A bill to ensure that all individuals who should be prohibited from buying a firearm are listed in the national instant criminal background check system; and require a background check for every firearm sale. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**



S. 1410: Smarter Sentencing Act of 2013—Amends the Federal criminal code to direct the court to impose a sentence for specified controlled substance offenses without regard to any statutory minimum sentence if the court finds that the criminal history category for the defendant is not higher than category two. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

S.822 Justice for All Reauthorization Act of 2013—Amends the federal criminal code to eliminate the substantial backlog of DNA samples collected from crime scenes. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**
H.R.359 - Campus Safety Act of 2013—To establish and operate a National Center for Campus Public Safety. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

H.R. 3484: Airport Security Act of 2013 - Directs the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security (Transportation Security Administration [TSA]) to establish a program to prohibit all but specified authorized individuals from possessing a firearm at a covered airport, including any individual who enters the airport, or exits public transportation at it, for air travel, meeting another individual, picking up cargo, or employment. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

H.R. 3478: Knife Owners' Protection Act of 2013—To protect the right of law abiding citizens to transport knives interstate, notwithstanding a patchwork of local and State prohibitions. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

H.R. 965: To Prohibit the possession or Transfer of junk guns, also known as Saturday Night Specials. Amends the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act to prohibit the possession or transfer of a junk gun which has been shipped or transported in inter state or foreign commerce. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

H.R. 3382: Smarter Sentencing Act of 2013—Amends the federal criminal code to direct the court to impose a sentence for specified controlled substance offenses without regard to any statutory minimum sentence if the court finds that the criminal history category for the defendant is not higher than category two. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

PRIORITY 4—IMMIGRATION REFORM:

S. 744: Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act - A bill to provide for comprehensive immigration reform. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL** *Senate passed this bill.*

HR. 5: Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act—A bill to provide for comprehensive immigration reform. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL** *House has not acted on this yet.*

H.R. 3431: American Families United Act To amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to promote family unity. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**



PRIORITY 5—EDUCATION:

S. 1697: Strong Start for America’s Children Act. A bill to support early learning, to allot matching grants to states and, through them, sub-grants to local educational agencies (LEAs), childhood education program providers, or consortia of those entities to implement high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for children from low-income families. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

S. 1704: Affordable College Textbook Act. A bill to expand the use of open text books in order to achieve savings for students, to make competitive grants to institutions of higher education (IHEs) to support pilot programs that expand the use of open textbooks in order to achieve savings for students. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

H.R. 3510: Stopping Unfair Collateral Consequences from Ending Student Success Act - To amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to repeal the suspension of eligibility for grants, loans, and assistance for drug-related offenses which makes persons convicted of drug offenses while receiving any grant, loan, or work assistance under title IV ineligible for that assistance for specified periods. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

PRIORITY 7- TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

H.R. 2001: Veterans E-Health & Telemedicine Support Act of 2013. Allows a health care professional who is authorized to provide health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to use telemedicine to provide treatment. **NAN SUPPORTS THIS BILL**





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