

## An inclusive democracy is vital to building a better Alabama for all

By Dev Wakeley, worker policy advocate (dev@alarise.org) | January 2026

Alabama was central to the struggle for democracy and voting rights in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. And the need for our state to do more to build a more inclusive democracy continues today. That is especially true after recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions affecting the rights of people nationwide to have their say in who represents them at the local, state and federal levels.

The court's *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling in 2012 weakened the Voting Rights Act significantly. After that decision, Alabama no longer was required to get federal permission (known as preclearance) before changing its voting rules. Since then, the state has acted repeatedly to make it harder for many people to vote.

Alabama Arise supports legislation to increase participation in our democracy by removing barriers to voting. In 2026, we will support legislative solutions including::

- **No-excuse absentee voting.** This would remove the need for voters to specify a reason for absentee voting.
- **Early voting.** This would give voters more time to participate in elections.

- **Greater accessibility for voters with disabilities.** Lawmakers should remove recent legal barriers that could have a chilling effect on people and groups acting in good faith to help voters who request assistance with absentee voting.
- **Lift barriers to voting rights restoration.** Legislators should require relevant state agencies to post information to assist disenfranchised Alabamians in navigating the process to restore their voting rights.

Bills requiring agencies to share info on voter rights restoration processes have advanced during previous sessions. This legislation would be an important next step toward increasing civic participation.

Alabama has a painful history of enacting policies that have made voting more inaccessible for older adults, people with disabilities, and Black and Hispanic people. Lawmakers should turn away from this harmful, divisive path and work instead to pass pro-democracy reforms to remove barriers to voting. These improvements would move our state away from its shameful past and toward a brighter future where every Alabamian can have a say in our democracy and stay engaged in the policymaking process.