

NAACP Virginia State Conference • League of Women Voters of Virginia  
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy • Virginia Poverty Law Center  
Northern Virginia Coalition • STEP-UP, Incorporated • Virginia CURE  
Virginia Organizing Project • Rutherford Institute • ACLU of Virginia

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January 5, 2010

VIA FAX: 804-371-6351

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine  
Governor of Virginia  
Patrick Henry Building  
1111 E. Broad Street  
Richmond VA 23219

Dear Governor Kaine:

We write to urge you to issue an executive order that will both restore voting rights for most or all felons in Virginia who have completed their sentences and establish a process by which their voting rights will be automatically restored to those who complete their sentences in the future.

Once as much a part of Jim Crow as poll taxes and literacy tests, felon disenfranchisement is no longer tolerated in the United States. Indeed, only Virginia and Kentucky still permanently disenfranchise all felons, requiring an act of the Governor to restore voting rights.

Virginia's outdated practice has left unable to vote approximately 300,000 Virginians who have completed their sentences. These individuals live in our communities and pay taxes, and most have families, jobs and homes, and participate in civic, religious and social organizations.

Because former felons who do not vote are twice as likely to be re-arrested as those who do, felon disenfranchisement is a counterproductive policy. Allowing individuals to vote who have repaid their debt to society makes better citizens and reduces the burden on taxpayers to support the criminal justice system.

Virginia is ready to join the 48 other states that either never remove voting rights or automatically restore voting rights for some or all felons. A 2006 survey shows that more than 60% of Virginia's voters favor reform of Virginia's felon disenfranchisement law. In addition, most of Virginia's major newspapers have called for felon disenfranchisement reform. This includes the *Roanoke Times*, *Daily Press*, *Virginian-Pilot*, *Washington Post* and the *Staunton News Leader*. We do not know of any newspaper that opposes reform.

In the last few years the Governor of Iowa, a Democrat, and the Governor of Florida, a Republican, have issued executive orders modernizing their state's felon disenfranchisement policies. If Kentucky reforms its felon disenfranchisement law, Virginia will be the last state in the nation still clinging to this shameful, anachronistic, and ineffective policy.

Most of us have met with you or your staff in recent weeks to discuss an executive order. We appreciate the numerous opportunities you have afforded us to engage in this important dialogue, and we understand that you are concerned about how an executive order would be implemented in Virginia.

Today we ask you to look beyond whatever minor obstacles lie before you and to act on the principles that have guided you in your distinguished career as an elected official by issuing an executive order automatically restoring voting rights for all or most of Virginia's former felons once they have completed their sentences, parole or probation.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

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cc: Mark Rubin, Counsel to the Governor  
Deputy Secretary Bernie Henderson