

American Probation and Parole Association

**APPA HEADQUARTERS**

c/o The Council of State Governments
P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910
(859) 244-8203 • FAX (859) 244-8001
E-mail address: appa@csg.org

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Carl Wicklund

February 10, 2009

Delegate Mark L. Cole
General Assembly Building
P.O. Box 406
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Delegate Cole:

I am the Executive Director of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), an international association composed of members from the United States, Canada and other countries who work in probation, parole and community-based corrections. Our members supervise more than 5 million people across the country and nearly 59,000 people in Virginia. I write in support of Senate Joint Resolution No. 273 (SJ 273), a bill that would grant the Virginia General Assembly the authority to restore voting rights to people with non-violent felony convictions who have completed their sentences. I encourage you, as Chair of the Privileges and Elections Committee, to ensure that SJ 273 is placed on the Committee's docket and is given a full and fair hearing.

As someone with 35 years of experience in the criminal justice field, I strongly believe that full civic participation by citizens living in our community protects public safety. There is no credible evidence that continuing to disenfranchise people after they have returned to the community serves any legitimate law enforcement purpose. To the contrary, restoring the right to vote sends the message that ex-offenders are welcome as integral members of their home communities and invests them in our democracy. Bringing people into the political process makes them stakeholders in their communities and encourages them to lead law-abiding lives, thereby decreasing recidivism. Reforming Virginia's disenfranchisement law through SJ 273 would strengthen the prospects for sustainable rehabilitation and protect public safety.

Last year, the APPA passed a resolution endorsing voting rights restoration after release from prison. I have attached a copy of the resolution for your reference. Other criminal justice and law enforcement agencies, including the American Correctional Association, the National Black Police Association and the Association of Paroling Authorities International, have passed similar resolutions.

Virginia has an historic opportunity to join the national movement to restore voting rights to people with non-violent convictions who have completed their sentences. In the interest of protecting public safety and promoting American democracy, I urge your committee to give a full hearing to SJ 273. Thank you for consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carl Wicklund
Executive Director

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