

American Probation and Parole Association



April 24, 2009

The Honorable Chris Gregoire
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98502-0002

Governor Gregoire:

As Executive Director of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) I write to urge you to sign House Bill 1517, the Voter Rights Restoration Act. With 35 years of experience in criminal and juvenile justice, I firmly believe that restoring voting rights to those released from prison encourages rehabilitation and assists community supervision officials and law enforcement efforts to promote public safety.

APPA is an international professional association with members throughout the United States, Canada and other countries who work in probation, parole and community-based corrections. These professionals supervise more than 5 million adults across the nation and know firsthand the challenges faced by those reentering society after incarceration.

Current state law in Washington requires people to not only complete their probation or parole sentences, but also to satisfy all outstanding legal financial obligations, including administrative fees, court-imposed fines and restitution. As interest and surcharges mount on top of economic sanctions, someone who cannot afford higher monthly installments will continue to accrue debt even as he makes monthly payments resulting in the possibility of lifetime voting prohibition.

The Voting Rights Restoration Act would eliminate the requirement that individuals pay all legal financial obligations before being eligible to vote. Fines, restitution and other obligations must still be met, but voting rights would not be withheld while payments are made. I strongly believe that bringing people with past convictions into the political process is an important part of rehabilitation and successful reintegration. Continuing to bar people from the polls brands them as outsiders, prevents full participation in their community and hinders reentry efforts. The heavy impact on low-income individuals is unfair and adds insult to injury for those who struggle with day to day responsibilities. Participation in the voting process affirms an individual's value to the political process. In addition, it encourages participation in civic life and builds connections to other law-abiding citizens who serve as support for those who may struggle with substance abuse or mental health issues.

Last year, APPA passed a Resolution in favor of restoring voting rights to individuals upon release from prison. I have attached a copy of the resolution for your reference. Other criminal justice and law enforcement organizations, including the American Correctional Association, the Association of State Correctional Administrators, the National Black Police Association and the Association of Paroling Authorities International have passed similar resolutions.

In the interest of protecting public safety and promoting democracy, I urge you sign House Bill 1517.

Sincerely,

Carl Wicklund
Executive Director

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