



NATIONAL BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION, INC.

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2008-2010**

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JUDGE ADVOCATE

RON E. STALLING

April 27, 2009

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

Re: The Voting Rights Restoration Act

Dear Governor Gregoire:

As Executive Director of the National Black Police Association (NBPA), I write to urge you to sign House Bill 1517, the Voter Rights Restoration Act. Having served the law enforcement community for 24 years, I firmly believe that a critical element of public safety and successful reintegration is restoring the right to vote to people who have been released from the criminal justice system and living in the community.

With several chartered organizations throughout the United States, the NBPA is a nationwide, non-profit professional association of African-American law enforcement officers dedicated to the promotion of justice, fairness and effective law enforcement. NBPA membership encompasses 34 states and the District of Columbia, as well as Canada, Bermuda, and the United Kingdom. As an advocate for minority police officers, a principal concern of the NBPA is the impact law enforcement and criminal justice policies have on minority communities.

The current law in Washington requires people to pay all outstanding fees, fines and restitution, including accrued interest, before being eligible to vote. The current law's disproportionate impact on African Americans is one of the worst in the country. Currently Washington disenfranchises a staggering 17% of its African-American population; more than twice the national average.¹ The current law not only has a disproportionate income on poor and minority citizens, it impedes the successful reintegration of people coming out of the criminal justice system.

¹ Jeff Manza & Christopher Uggen, *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy* Tbl. A3.4 (2006).



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The Voting Rights Restoration Act restores voting rights to thousands of citizens already living and working in Washington's communities. It removes the requirement that individuals must pay all their legal financial obligations before being eligible to vote. Removing this barrier would effectively facilitate the work of police departments.

A strong partnership between police and the communities they serve is a critical component of law enforcement. When a group of individuals is barred from participating in the democratic process, they are effectively relegated to second-class citizenship where it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for law enforcement to meaningfully engage and partner with them.

Additionally, shutting individuals out of the democratic process serves no law enforcement purpose and weakens the prospects for sustainable rehabilitation. The opportunity for individuals to become civically engaged both aids in fully integrating them into their communities and helps to reduce recidivism. One study shows former offenders who vote are 50% less likely to be rearrested than those who do not.

As former Seattle Chief of Police Gil Kerlikowske and Snohomish County Sheriff John Lovick explained in their February 12th op-ed in favor of House Bill 1517: "We want those who leave prison to become productive and law-abiding citizens. Voting puts them on that path."²

I urge you to sign House Bill 1517. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ron Hampton / GM

Ron Hampton
Executive Director

² Gil Kerlikowske & John Lovick, *Restore Voting Rights to Ex-Felons*, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Guest Columnists (Feb. 12, 2009).