



NATIONAL BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION, INC.

3251 MT. PLEASANT STREET - NW
SECOND FLOOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20010

OFFICE (202) 986-2070
FAX (202) 986-0410
nbpanatofc@worldnet.att.net
www.blackpolice.org

NATIONAL OFFICERS 2006-2008

MARCUS G. JONES
National Chairman

CYNTHIA PARKER-FERGUSON
National Vice Chairperson

VALERIE CUMMINGS
National Secretary

EDWARD A. HAMPTON
National Fiscal Officer

MELVIN D. MAXWELL
National Parliamentarian

CHARLES A. DREW
Sergeant at Arms

REGIONAL PRESIDENTS

HORATIOUS "RAY" PETTY
Western Region

LARRY POTTS
Midwest Region

WILLIE L. WILLIAMS, III
Eastern Region

BOBBY J. WESTBROOK
Southern Region

ROGER L. ABEL
Northeast Region

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOB E. ALEXANDER
DENISE L. ALVIS
MALIK AZIZ
SEFTON BURKE
PRISCILLA GREEN
VERNON HALE, III
EDWARD L. HANNISBERRY
STERLING HAUSER
JOHN HAYES, JR.
WALTER L. HOLLOWAY
SHERRI LOCKETT
CHRISTOPHER B. LYNCH
DEBORAH M. MOORE
MACKOVIS PEEBLES, III
ROBERT RIVERS, JR.
LESLIE J. SEYMORE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RONALD E. HAMPTON

LEGAL COUNCIL

TED J. WILLIAMS

ADVISORY PANEL

PRESTON K. GILSTRAP
DORIS M. BYRD
WENDEL F. FRANCE
LESLIE J. SEYMORE

CHAPLAIN

RITA HALL

JUDGE ADVOCATE

RON E. STALLING

TESTIMONY OF RON STALLING IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 488

March 9, 2006

Maryland has a historic opportunity to make its democratic system more inclusive and fair, to remedy longstanding inequality, and to enhance public safety. On behalf of the National Black Police Association ("NBPA"), I strongly endorse Senate Bill 488 and urge the Legislature to pass this important bill.

I served for 32 years as a sworn police officer in the United States Secret Service, retiring in 2002. I have been a member of the NBPA since 1988, and I currently serve as the organization's Judge Advocate. I have been a resident of Maryland for over 35 years, having lived in Prince George's County, Montgomery County, and Howard County, where I currently reside.

My perspective on this bill is formed not only by my own professional experiences, but also by my participation in the NBPA, a national membership organization that represents over 15,000 law enforcement officers. The NBPA, formed in 1972, represents officers dedicated to the promotion of justice, fairness, and effectiveness in law enforcement. The principal concern of the NBPA is improving law enforcement, which includes making certain that policing has a positive effect on all communities. The NBPA serves as an advocate for minority police officers and establishes a national network for the training and education of all police officers and others interested in law enforcement.

First and foremost, reforming Maryland's disenfranchisement law would further the purposes of law enforcement. Restoring voting rights promotes the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated people, preventing further crime and making our neighborhoods safer. Re-enfranchising people who have served their sentences is a fair way to treat people, and it is also an effective way to enhance public safety.

Existing law keeps formerly incarcerated people from voting long after they complete their sentences, thereby undercutting the critical process of reintegrating these people back into their communities. Under the current system, over 111,000 Maryland citizens are barred from voting because of a criminal conviction. About half of these people have fully discharged their

sentences.¹ This means they are back in their communities, supporting their families and leading law-abiding lives as taxpaying citizens of Maryland.

Indeed, Maryland has the dubious distinction of being one of only 11 states to disenfranchise some people even after they have completed their sentences. Even beyond the vast numbers of formally disenfranchised Maryland citizens, an untold number of eligible voters are effectively disenfranchised because the state's overly complex voting system creates massive confusion among potential voters.

From the perspective of law enforcement, excluding so many people from the political process is counterproductive. Voting is an important part of making people feel connected to their communities, which in turn helps them avoid falling back into crime. Studies show that former felons who are effectively reintegrated into their communities are more likely to lead law-abiding lives. In fact, one study has shown that former offenders who vote are about 50% less likely to commit new crimes than those who don't vote.² This is not surprising. An important factor in preventing recidivism is helping formerly incarcerated people feel connected to their community.

Restoring the right to vote sends the message that formerly incarcerated people are welcomed back as integral members of their home communities. It gives them a stake in our democracy and emphasizes the civic duties that accompany democratic participation. Shutting people out of the democratic process has the opposite effect: it stymies reintegration by treating people with felony records as second-class citizens and perpetual outsiders.

Other states have seen the advantages of expanding the franchise. In fact, the national trend has moved steadily toward more inclusive voting systems. Since 1997, sixteen states have reformed their laws or policies to reduce barriers to voting by people with criminal records.

Maryland has an opportunity to make its election system serve the objectives of law enforcement. On behalf of the National Black Police Association, I urge all members of the Legislature to support Senate Bill 488.

¹ JEFF MANZA & CHRISTOPHER UGGEN, LOCKED OUT: FELON DISENFRANCHISEMENT AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY 249 (2006).

² MANZA & UGGEN, LOCKED OUT at 133.