



Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.
Nu Xi Zeta Chapter serving Alexandria, VA
P.O. Box 25961
Alexandria, VA 22313

VIA EMAIL: district39@senate.virginia.gov

January 31, 2011

The Honorable George Barker
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, VA 23218

Re: Support SJ 284 - Restoration of Voting Rights

Dear Senator Barker:

I am writing you on behalf of the Alexandria, Virginia Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. regarding an issue of great importance to our organization – restoration of voting rights for citizens with felony convictions in the State of Virginia.

Currently, it is estimated that 378,000 citizens in Virginia are barred from voting. Virginia is one of only two states that permanently disenfranchise individuals with felony convictions, leaving it to the Governor to restore those voting rights to an individual. Today, thirty-seven states restore voting rights to former felons upon release from incarceration, and completion of parole or probation. Two states – Maine and Vermont – never revoke the voting rights of its citizens.

I urge you to support reform of Virginia's felon disenfranchisement law, specifically SJ 284.

SJ 284 amends the Virginia Constitution to permit the General Assembly to pass laws for the restoration of civil rights for persons convicted of non-violent felonies who have completed their sentences.

There are three main reasons to support this reform. First, felon disenfranchisement is fundamentally unfair. Once individuals have paid their debt to society, they should be allowed to fully reintegrate into society – civic engagement can be a critical element to their success. Second, felon disenfranchisement is an outdated policy from the Jim Crow era that was intended to suppress minority voters. Unfortunately, it still disproportionately impacts people of color. African-Americans make up more than 50% of the state's disenfranchised population, despite being only 20% of the total population. Third, felon disenfranchisement is counterproductive. Studies show that felons who do not vote are twice as likely to commit another crime as those who do vote.

For these reasons, I urge you to support voting rights restoration reform and support SJ 284.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. is a community-conscious, action-oriented organization committed to effectively and compassionately meeting the needs of the communities it serves. Without exception, the members of the Alexandria, Virginia Chapter are equally committed to improving the quality of life in our local communities, while embracing the transitions needed to meet the challenges of the new millennium. For more information, visit www.nuxizeta.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emmanuella Duplessy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emmanuella Duplessy, President
Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.
Nu Xi Zeta Chapter

Cc: Monica Reid, Social Action Chair