

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 07-0252R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Holton, Kraft, Young, Curran, President Rawlings-Blake,
Councilmembers Reisinger, Mitchell, Harris, D’Adamo, Conaway, Welch
Introduced and adopted: February 12, 2007

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING

In Support of State Legislation – Senate Bill 488 - Voter Registration Protection Act

FOR the purpose of supporting this legislation that would restore voter registration rights to ex-felons who have completed the court-ordered sentences imposed for their convictions; urging the Honorable Chairs and Members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee to give the legislation a favorable report; requesting the Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the Maryland General Assembly to support passage of the legislation; and petitioning the Governor to sign the measure into law.

Recitals

The Sentencing Project, a national non-profit organization that promotes sentencing reform and conducts research on criminal justice issues, reports that, nationally, an estimated 5.3 million Americans are denied the right to vote because of laws that prohibit voting by people with felony convictions and that this fundamental obstacle to participation in democratic life is exacerbated by racial disparities in the criminal justice system, resulting in an estimated 13% of African American men – 1.4 million – unable to vote.

In Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States, a joint report of officials of *The Sentencing Project* and *Human Rights Watch*, it is reported that “disenfranchisement laws in the U.S. are a vestige of medieval times when offenders were banished from the community and suffered ‘civil death.’ Brought from Europe to the colonies, they gained new political salience at the end of the nineteenth century when disgruntled whites in a number of Southern states adopted them and other ostensibly race-neutral voting restrictions in an effort to exclude blacks from voting.”

In current times, the laws have no discernable legitimate purpose. “Deprivation of the right to vote is not an inherent or necessary aspect of criminal punishment nor does it promote the reintegration of offenders into lawful society. Indeed, defenders of these laws have been hard pressed to justify them: they most frequently cite the patently inadequate goal of protecting against voter fraud or the anachronistic and politically untenable objective of preserving the ‘purity of the ballot box’ by excluding voters lacking in virtue.”

In Maryland, current State law allows for first-time offenders who have completed their sentences to register to vote. After a second felony conviction, an ex-offender cannot vote again unless pardoned by the governor, a process that can take from 17 to 27 years from the last day of the sentenced served. For all intents and purposes, twice- convicted felons permanently lose the right to vote in this State.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 According to a report released in 2002, by a Maryland General Assembly task force, about
2 135,700 people – both incarcerated and released – are denied the right to vote. This figure,
3 which represents 3.6% of the adult population in Maryland, disproportionately affects Baltimore
4 City residents because of the historically high rate of incarceration of our young male adults.
5 Being forever banned from participation in a fundamental exercise of democratic participation
6 should not be a lifetime consequence of youthful indiscretions.

7 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That this
8 Body supports this legislation that would restore voter registration rights to ex-felons who have
9 completed the court-ordered sentences imposed for their convictions; urges the Honorable Chairs
10 and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the
11 House Ways and Means Committee to give the legislation a favorable report; requests the Chairs
12 and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the Maryland General
13 Assembly to support passage of the legislation; and petitions the Governor to sign the measure
14 into law.

15 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the Honorable Chairs of the Senate Education, Health,
16 and Environmental Affairs and House Ways and Means Committees are respectfully requested
17 to include this Resolution as part of the Committee record of support for legislative proposals to
18 restore the voting rights of ex-felons.

19 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor, the
20 Mayor, the Honorable Chairs and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental
21 Affairs and House Ways and Means Committees, the Honorable Chairs and Members of the
22 Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the Maryland General Assembly, the Honorable
23 Gwendolyn Britt, the Honorable Joan Carter Conway, the Honorable Ulysses Currie, the
24 Honorable Lisa A. Gladden, the Honorable Delores G. Kelley, the Honorable Catherine E. Pugh,
25 the Honorable Jim Rosapepe, the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of State Relations,
26 and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.