

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Sept. 24, 2012

CONTACT:

Malissa Gamble (267) 298-6742
Richard Carter (215) 390-4114

Voting Rights Initiative Launched to Mobilize PA Residents Who Risk Losing Their Vote

Press Conference Kicks Off

“Welcome to the Struggle: The Returning Citizen Voter Movement,” 4 Day Conference on Mobilizing Strategies for the Formerly Incarcerated

Who: Representatives of the **Returning Citizen Voter Movement** and leaders of the **Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People’s Movement (FICPM)** from Alabama, California, Louisiana and New York. (see bios attached)

What: Press conference kicking off 4 days of voter mobilization activities including a convening, trainings and voter registration in communities hardest hit by Voter ID and other disenfranchisement policies.

When: Wednesday, September 26th, 10-11 am

Where: Berean Institute, 1901 W. Girard Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19130

The **Returning Citizen Voter Movement** is launching a voter mobilization initiative to protect and empower residents who are most at risk of losing their right to vote in the November elections. The initiative kicks off with a 4-day conference in Philadelphia, Sept. 26-29, which includes workshops on voter mobilization strategies and the growing movement to restore civil rights to people with conviction histories, including voting rights. Participants will conduct voter registration in Philadelphia neighborhoods hardest hit by voter ID laws and other disenfranchisement policies.

Earlier this month, mobilization organizers issued a national call for voting rights activists, including members of the Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People’s Movement, to join them for the launch, citing that “voting rights for people with conviction histories vary widely state to state. In Pennsylvania, we have the right to register to vote when we’re released from prison or jail, but past convictions or incarceration will result in lifelong disenfranchisement in many other states. We are passionate about the right to vote because we are fighting for full restoration of our rights everywhere.” [note: full statement below]

Parallel activities are planned in Pittsburgh starting Sept. 26 under the auspices of the National Council for Urban Peace and Justice. In both cities, Pennsylvania voting advocates will be joined by members of the FICPM (Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People’s Movement) who have been working to insure voting rights for people with conviction histories in their home states of Louisiana, Alabama, New York, California, Michigan and Texas through voter education, litigation and other strategies.

Malissa Gamble, co-founder of the Returning Citizen Voter Movement, was first introduced to efforts to expand and protect voting and civil rights for people with felonies at a FICPM convening in Alabama in 2011. "I was so inspired I wanted to come home and get started right away," said Gamble. According to Gamble, one of the problems is that the estimated 400,000 Philadelphians with conviction histories don't realize they can register. "That's one reason we've invited allies to come from other states to share their experience in winning voting rights," said Gamble. "Sometimes folks get flat, we do our best here but the spirits of the people get down, they are tired of hearing the same thing all the time from the same people and think that nothing is going to change, so we wanted to do something different. We wanted to show that there are people out here with the same struggles all over the US."

Dorsey Nunn, co-founder of the FICPM traveling from San Francisco, CA for the mobilization, notes that voter ID laws pose a special challenge to people in re-entry. "I know people are being released from jails and prisons everyday that are eligible to vote in every other respect except that they are being released without identifications. Many will also find it difficult to prove residency. I want to support these people and I'm also concerned about the impact of ID laws on the students and elders in our communities," said Nunn. Noting the disparities in US voting laws, Nunn adds, "I think that voting should be a federal and constitutional right. I ask myself, am I a citizen of the state? The county? The country? This is a serious question because as it is now, I can move from one state to another and lose the fundamental right to vote."

In addition to visitors from other states, **Returning Voter Citizen Movement** member organizations will be participating in the mobilization. These include the ACLU, And Justice for All, EXIT-US, Ray of Hope Project, Reconstruction, EARTHS (Educational Advocates Reaching Today's Hardworking Students, Inc.), THE TIME IS NOW TO MAKE A CHANGE, US Positive Women's Network, Witness to Innocence, Women of Transformation, Human Rights Coalition-Chester. The trainings and workshops are open to the public with a special focus on service providers, halfway houses, probation and parole offices and other agencies and community settings interested in supporting the voting rights of their constituents.

- - - - -

Statement by leaders of the Returning Citizen Voter Movement in Philadelphia

As civil rights organizations participating in the Returning Citizen Voter Movement in Philadelphia, we call on our brothers and sisters across the United States to join us in the struggle for voting rights in Pennsylvania. Today, Pennsylvania is on the frontline of Republican efforts to steal the vote from poor people, people of color, the elderly, and new citizens. The requirement to present photo ID in order to vote denies this fundamental right to thousands of people without acceptable forms of identification, many of us people of color who have past convictions. We are asking formerly-incarcerated and formerly-

convicted people everywhere to JOIN US in assisting people in Pennsylvania to access their right to vote.

Voting rights for people with conviction histories vary widely state to state. In Pennsylvania, we have the right to register to vote when we're released from prison or jail, but past convictions or incarceration will result in lifelong disenfranchisement in many other states. We are passionate about the right to vote because we are fighting for full restoration of our rights everywhere. We can never guarantee our civil or human rights without the right to vote, including the right to vote in prison or jail. If we don't participate, our voice will be silenced.

People of color were enslaved and excluded from voting until the Fifteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution in 1870, prohibiting denial of the vote based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Women of all races were denied the vote until 1920. Poll taxes, literacy tests, physical violence were the precursors of today's photo ID laws – all used to stop poor people and people of color from voting. We have never been welcomed into the electoral process – we have always fought and died for the right to vote and to hold office.

Now the voting rights of students, elderly people, new immigrants, and poor people generally are also under attack. In Pennsylvania, formerly-incarcerated and formerly-convicted people are joining other civil rights organizations in a unified effort to guarantee voting rights for all. The Returning Citizen Voter Movement will host four days of voter mobilization activities to welcome people with conviction or incarceration histories to the struggle for voting rights in Pennsylvania.

Join Us!!

#

Conference agenda on next page

**Welcome to The Struggle: Returning Citizen Voter Movement
CONFERENCE AGENDA – SEPTEMBER 25TH -29TH**

Tuesday – September 25th – Out of state delegation arrives
Wyndham Garden Philadelphia Airport - 45 Industrial Highway
Essington, PA 19029 Tel: 610-521-2400

Wednesday – September 26th

10:00 – 11:00 **Press Conference** – Berean Institute/1901 W. Girard Ave, Phil.
PA 19130
1:00 – 3:00 **Voter Registration Training** at Returning Citizens Voter
Movement office located at 3956 N. 5th Street.

Thursday – September 27th

10:00 - 12:00 Pending: City Council and/or State Representative recognition for
FICPM & The Returning Citizens Voter Movement & The Time Is
Now To Make A Change Inc. (Councilmember, Maria D. Quiñones
and Sánchez State Rep. Cherelle Parker) – location TBA
1:00 – 3:00 Chat and Chew (Berean Institute)
3:00 – 5:00 **Voter registration field activity**
5:00 – 6:00 Dinner break
6:00 – 9:00 **Voter registration field activity**

Friday – September 28th

9:00 – 12:00 **Panel Discussion: The FICP Movement & Voting Rights**
How it came about- Pastor Kenneth Glasgow, The Ordinary
People's Society, Dothan, AL
What is a movement? Dorsey Nunn, All of Us or None – Legal
Services for Prisoners with Children/San Francisco, CA
The Power Of The Vote – Joseph “Jazz” Hayden/New York, NY
The Importance of The Vote – Susan Burton, A New Way of
Life/Los Angeles, CA
1:00 – 5:00 **Voter registration & time for news media interviews**
5:00 – 6:00 Dinner break
6:00 – 9:00 **Voter registration field activity**

Saturday, September 29th

9:00 – 12:00 Debrief and farewell activity