



January 17, 2018

Ex-Offenders Voter Registration Drive

Interested stakeholders and I will hold a press conference on January 18, 2018, to announce a voter registration drive for ex-offenders and to call on candidates for governor for the state of Illinois to make ex-offenders and their re-entry back into society a major agenda item once they enter office as governor. Stakeholders will include: Westside Health Authority, Safer Foundation, A Safe Haven, NAEFI Keeping It Real Project, NLEN National Black Agenda Consortium, Roy Flowers - Chair of 8th District Reentry Committee, Raymond Richard, Women's Prison Ministry, Inmates for Change, Chicago Votes, and ex-offenders.

Compared with many states, Illinois has a more lenient view toward ex-felons being able to get their voting rights back after they have served their prison time. While anyone incarcerated because of a felony cannot vote, voting rights are instantly reinstated upon release from the prison system. In addition, anyone who is on probation or parole is able to vote.

We are calling on all candidates for governor and debate planners to make re-entry issues a priority. Over 4 million citizens in Illinois have some form of criminal record. This is a large voting block that can elect the next governor of Illinois. Family members of ex-offenders and ex-offenders themselves are strong power bases for any candidate running to be elected to office.

When people are released back into the community from prison, they often face serious barriers, such as physical or mental health problems, no place to stay, or a lack of education or qualifications to hold a job. If we want to end the street violence in Chicago and across Illinois, we must open the gates to opportunities for those with criminal records.

Forty-eight percent of ex-offenders in Illinois end up back in prison within three years of release. We must improve the prospects of people's second chances and provide the opportunity to re-enter society as productive citizens, encouraging continuing support of these returning citizens as they re-enter their communities, if we want to lower the recidivism rate.

Unfortunately, when ex-offenders have served their time and are released back into the community, the system does not give them a fair shake. A criminal background in America is a disability that prevents citizens from living a productive life in America. Even those who were wrongfully convicted have to carry the burden of a negative image on their shoulders. This is causing us to see a repeated cycle in our prison system and in our communities. We must not turn our backs and pretend this is not an issue with our family, friends and community.

An estimated 70 million people in the United States have a criminal arrest or conviction record. This is a large number, and this number plus family and friends can elect the next American president. President Trump received 62,984,825 votes and Mrs. Clinton received 65,853, 516 votes in the last election. We must remember that this is a powerful voting block that must be awakened.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, every arrest comes with a sentence: guilty or not guilty. A 2012 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, found that eighty-six percent of employers use criminal background checks on at least some candidates, with the majority - sixty-nine percent - checking all candidates. In a similar 2010 survey by the same group, thirty-one percent of respondents said an arrest without conviction would at least be "somewhat influential" in their hiring decision. And having even a low-level misdemeanor conviction on one's record can stand in the way of getting a job.

So many people who have paid their debt to society still struggle to find ways to clear their names - struggling for total freedom and the opportunities they deserve. It's not a surprise that a high level of violence happens in communities where the most people are released from Illinois' state prisons. We can no longer shut American citizens out of the work force, education, and housing in Illinois. Candidates running for governor of Illinois should see re-entry issues and reforms of our corrections system as priorities if they are asking for our votes.

Join us at the press conference on Thursday, January 18, 2018 at 9 a.m. at Herb's Barbershop at 5118 W. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, or contact us at repford@lashawnford.com if you are interested in this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District