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Contact:

Anne Barron 973-642-2086

Chris Entrekin 805-338-9144

Dudley Griffith 973-684-8880

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
www.acorn.org

Paterson, NJ- Following a positive meeting with Superintendent of Elections Laura Freytes, ACORN and the ACLU-NJ are reminding citizens – especially those who have committed a felony and completed their sentence and parole -- to register to vote before the registration deadline of October 11th.

Under NJ law, ex-felons are eligible to vote after completing their period of parole and probation. They simply must register to vote like anyone else. Over the past few years, ACORN has registered thousands of new voters, and reached out to ex-felons to make sure they knew they had the right to vote. However, the former Superintendent of Elections of Passaic County insisted that ex-felons registering to vote provide a letter from their probation office – an action that is not required under New Jersey law.

“I had a problem with the law many years ago, and I’ve tried to register, but when I show up to vote, I’m not on the list,” said ACORN member Andres Benitez. “I’m registering again with ACORN, and am excited about being able to vote this year in the hope that Passaic County is coming into compliance with New Jersey Law, because this is a democracy.”

The ACLU-NJ recently did a survey of county election offices and found that eight other counties in addition to Passaic County also require additional documentation. This requirement has introduced additional barriers, which have kept many eager and eligible voters with prior convictions from voting. Often times, people with felony convictions have difficulty tracking down former parole officers and documentation.

At the meeting last week, ACORN and ACLU-NJ representatives found the new superintendent and her staff eager to make sure that voters were not disenfranchised by the registration process. They had already realized that problems existed and promised that the process would be less cumbersome in the future. The discussion with the Superintendent of Elections leads us to believe that all voter registrations coming in from citizens with prior convictions would be verified by the staff and processed.

Anne Barron, project director of the ACLU-NJ Ex-Offender Voting Rights Project, applauded the Passaic County Superintendent of Elections’ efforts to register people with prior convictions. “The voter registration deadline for the November 8th elections is looming and still there are counties that continue to demand illegal documents from citizens with prior convictions trying to register,” said Barron.

The Unlock the Vote Campaign in New Jersey expressed its concern about the number of people, both in the community and among government offices, who remain unaware of the voting rights previously convicted citizens. “Too many ex-offenders already believe they have lost the right to vote; these excessive demands from some county election officials only reinforces this fallacy”, stated Elijah Muhammad, a member of the Campaign.

ACORN and the ACLU-NJ are waiting for final confirmation that the voter registration process will be brought into compliance with New Jersey law, but understand that Passaic county has improved their procedure to bring their office into compliance. We encourage people who would like to register to vote to turn in their registration before October 11th. Voter registrations are available at the ACORN office, which can be reached at 973-684-8880 or on the web at www.aclu-nj.org.