The BlueShift Group

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Community Coalition Kicks Off Voter Registration in Capital District Jails

National Voter Registration Day viewed as only the start of a local effort to engaging all eligible voices, even those most seldom heard from, in voting as an act of civic responsibility.

Albany NY – September 26, 2018 – The September 25th National Voter Registration Day has come and gone. However, the past several weeks in Albany NY has been witness to the development of a new coalition of community, civic and college organizations. Their primary purpose is to enter into the capital area jails to register voters. Since voting is foundational to good citizenship, the mission is to reengage those in the county jails in citizenship by making them aware of their right to vote and their responsibility to do so as citizens.

The official kick off for the “Coalition for Voter Registration in NY Capital District Jails”, to connect with inmates of the Albany County Corrections Facility, coincided with Tuesday’s National Voter Registration Day. That day brought over 30 community and college volunteers into the facility to visit with 41 scheduled inmates in various stages of the criminal justice process. “The positive comments that came from both inmates, and volunteers, have convinced us that this coalition’s mission is definitely worth continuing”, explained Regina Tillman, who is current League of Women Voters Albany County (LWVAC) Vice President, and has been in the role of coordinator for the coalition’s effort since its inception several weeks ago. Said Ms. Tillman, “We are hoping that we will also garner even greater interest by the inmates overtime as the word spreads that this is an activity that is inclusive in nature, educational in focus, and pleasant to experience.”

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The Coalition members are of the hope that interaction with its volunteers, reflecting diversity in backgrounds and ages, can help inmates to begin to embrace their role as part of the decision-making population. The one-on-one voter registration process is augmented with a 10 minutes presentation on the history of voting rights in this country, developed and presented by Jacqui Williams (representing CAAMI/Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration) and Barbara Smith (representing the NY Poor People’s Campaign). Up to date information is provided to inmates on their eligibility to vote, some of which was unknown to them, along with literature from the League of Women Voters and other reliable sources handed out for review at their own leisure.

The Coalition has already set another date for their voter registration drives in Albany County’s Correctional Facility, located at 840 Albany Shaker Road, Albany NY. The next one is scheduled for Tuesday, October 9th. Volunteers have already been trained by specific Coalition members in two previous training sessions. Trainers included Jacqui Williams, Barbara Smith, and Regina Tillman, along with Andrea (Andy) Lee - Voter Services Co-Chairperson, LWVAC and Nicole Zagreda - Director, Prisoner’s Rights Pro Bono Project at Albany Law School.

Those trained, currently approximating 60 in number, need only sign up for the desired October 9th time slots. However, as the initiative expands to both an ongoing local effort and the inclusion of all of the county jails within the Capital NY region, more volunteer will be welcomed for training and more civic and community-based organizations will be encouraged to join, sharing resources and information.

Director, Prisoner’s Rights Pro Bono Project at Albany Law School, Nicole Zagreda said, “The Prisoner’s Rights Pro Bono Project aims to advocate for those incarcerated by supporting clients through application processes, and by gaining familial and community support. We are grateful to be working with the Coalition for Voter Registration in County Jails as a way to encourage detainees to engage in their civic duties and exercise their rights as members of the community.”

NY Poor People’s Campaign Representative, Barbara Smith said, “A National Call for Moral Revival has prioritized registering people to vote whose voices are often ignored and who are disenfranchised because of voter suppression, gerrymandering, and other tactics. The NYS Poor People’s Campaign is pleased to work with the Coalition for Voter Registration in County Jails to ensure that everyone can exercise their voting rights.”

GenVote@UAlbany Coordinator, Brandan Cushing said, “GenVote@UAlbany is honored to be a part of the Community Coalition for Voter Registration in Capital NY County Jails as one of a number of organizations that have a base in the capital region. As of this spring, a Gubernatorial Executive Order allows for people on parole to register to vote, and to actually
vote! As a result, and the national push to register new voters, this coalition formed and will be hosting educational sessions with voter registration drives in the Albany County jail for all eligible inmates. GenVote, and the rest of the coalition, look onward to the 2018 midterm elections!"

**Voter Services Co-chairperson, Andrea (Andy) Lee said**, “The Albany County League of Women Voters is pleased to be able to work with so many able and motivated groups to offer registration opportunities to County inmates. We work hard year round to increase the number of voters as well as voter education and turn out on election days. Our collaboration within this coalition will continue to impact the Capitol Region with events and increasing exposure to the importance of voting for all eligible members of our community.”

**Albany County Sheriff Craig D. Apple, Sr. said,** “The right to vote is a fundamental right protected under our constitution. If we are brave enough to listen to these individuals express their opinions, they might just help us to solve some of the serious issues facing our nation today. I believe a person who takes the initiative to register to vote is much more likely to get involved with their community in a positive way.”


Related information may be obtained by emailing the Coalition Coordinator, Regina Tillman, at rmt371@live.com, with “Voter Registration in County Jails” in the subject line. Donations are also being accepted to fund the reading materials handed out to inmates and support online expansion and coordination of project volunteers.

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Event photo will be made available in separate attachment.