

NAACP Unveils “Restore the Votes” Billboard in Iowa

Written by Jessica Neal
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Restore the Votes Awareness Campaign Continues

(Des Moines, IA)— The NAACP and the NAACP Iowa State Conference are putting a face to their continuous efforts to restore the votes for people who were formerly convicted of felonies. The organizations unveiled a billboard on Highway 69, just south of the Capitol and state offices, to raise awareness of the issue. The [billboard image](#) portrays individuals whose rights have been negatively impacted by voter disenfranchisement.

The state conference has been a steady advocate for expanding reentry services and restoring the votes of people with former felony convictions who have completed all the terms of their sentences. The Iowa billboard launch will expound on national efforts across Florida, Virginia, Kentucky, Delaware, and Iowa to restore the votes.

“While Governor Branstad is joining a group of state governors and state legislatures across Virginia, Delaware, and Kentucky who are taking steps to restore the votes for citizens who have paid their debts to society, it is important for the state conference, local NAACP branches, NAACP and other leading organizations to bring awareness to the issue, continue the conversation and push for more permanent solutions like automatic restoration of rights,” said Arnold Woods, President of the NAACP Iowa and Nebraska State Conference.

In December, Governor Terry Branstad and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds released an updated application designed to make it easier for returning citizens to restore their voting rights: a streamlined application, clarifying instructions, simplifying the application process, and removing requirements such as credit history checks.

The NAACP hopes that the billboard also serves as a reminder for people formerly convicted of felonies to continue to seek restoration of rights under the new application process.

“The faces on the billboard represent millions of citizens whose voices are silenced because of past felony convictions,” said Jotaka Eaddy, NAACP Senior Director for Voting Rights. “These are parents, taxpayers, students, employees, and in some cases employers who are expected to reintegrate and function normally in a society where they cannot cast a vote.”

On the NAACP’s billboard, the faces of Kemba Smith Pradia, Desmond Meade, and Jessica Chiaponne provide the backdrop for the tagline “They made mistakes. They did their time. They deserve to vote.” On October 5, 2012 the Commonwealth of Virginia reinstated Kemba Smith Pradia’s right to vote. President Bill Clinton gave Smith Pradia executive clemency in 2000. Desmond Meade and Jessica Chiaponne, President and Vice President of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, have still been unable to restore their votes.

The NAACP Restore the Votes Campaign aims to restore the right to vote for millions of

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citizens formerly convicted of felonies. The campaign was launched in October following the NAACP’s delegation at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. As part of the visit, the delegation held a panel discussion on felony disenfranchisement and the attack on voting rights in states across the nation.

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Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.