



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Wednesday, August 16, 2006

CONTACT: Hedy Weinberg, ACLU-TN Executive Director (615) 320-7142, or  
Michele Flynn, ACLU-TN Right to Vote Coordinator (615) 320-7142

**ACLU-TN Announces "Get Your Right to Vote Back" Town Hall Meeting  
in Chattanooga on Monday, August 21**

NASHVILLE - The American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee (ACLU-TN) will hold the fourth in its statewide series of "Get Your Right to Vote Back" town hall meetings in Chattanooga on Monday, August 21 at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Library from 6:30-8:30 p.m. (see attached flyer)

As part of its "Right To Vote" Campaign, ACLU-TN is organizing town meetings across the state to explain the new Tennessee Statute (Public Chapter 860) that creates a uniform system for restoring voting rights for former felons and provides an opportunity to register to vote. During the last two years, ACLU-TN has spearheaded a "Right to Vote" (RTV) Campaign in an effort to restore voting rights for former felons.

Hedy Weinberg, ACLU-TN Executive Director, explained, "Tennessee's felony voting rights restoration law, a patchwork quilt of rules, restrictions, and procedures, was the most confusing and complicated in the United States. After two years of broad organizational and bipartisan support and legislative advocacy, the Tennessee Legislature passed a law that streamlines the procedure. The new law is an important first step to ensure that persons convicted of a felony who have completed their sentence can have their right to vote restored."

Michele Flynn, the ACLU-TN Right to Vote (RTV) Campaign coordinator, said, "ACLU-TN is holding town hall meetings across the state to educate the community about the new law, to discuss the positive impact of changing the restoration process on individuals and the community, and to inform former felons, their family members and advocates about the new voting registration process."

The Chattanooga town hall meeting, co-sponsored by the NAACP-Chattanooga-Hamilton County Branch, will begin with a clip from the film "Democracy's Ghosts: How 5 Million Americans have Lost the Right to Vote." A panel discussion will follow, with panelists including Ryan S. King, The Sentencing Project; Joseph White, Chattanooga Bar Association; Denver Schimming, a former felon whose voting rights have been restored. and representatives from the National Right to Vote Campaign and the Hamilton County Election Commission. The League of Women Voters will be on hand to register eligible voters.

The new law creates a uniform system that allows most persons who have completed their sentence (including probation and parole), paid court ordered restitution, and are current on all court ordered child support payments to apply for and receive a "certificate of voting rights restoration" and to register to vote. (Public Chapter 860)

Weinberg explained that "ACLU-TN and its RTV partners remain committed to additional reforms in order to make the law more user-friendly and to ensure that all former felons can regain their full voting rights."

ACLU-TN has serious concerns about one provision in the new law which was attached late in the legislative process. According to Weinberg, "The provision, which prevents restoration of voting rights if individuals are not current in their child support payments, unfairly penalizes poor mothers and fathers who may never have enough money to buy back their franchise. ACLU-TN is now in the process of identifying individuals adversely affected by this unconstitutional provision and plans to challenge the blatantly unfair and unconstitutional provision."

ACLU-TN also has scheduled town hall meetings in Nashville - Thursday, August 31; Clarksville - Tuesday, September 5; Murfreesboro - Wednesday, September 6; and Jackson - Thursday, September 7. ACLU-TN held town hall meetings in Knoxville, Memphis, and Johnson City earlier this month.

Explaining ACLU-TN's work in this area, Weinberg said, "Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. A voice is a vote, and ACLU-TN is committed to ensuring that every citizen has the right to use their voice."

The "Tennessee Right to Vote (RTV)" Campaign is a coalition of civil rights and civil liberties organizations working to restore voting rights for people with felony convictions. The Campaign, spearheaded by ACLU-TN, includes the Catholic Public Policy Commission, Tennessee AFL-CIO Labor Council, Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, The Restoration Project and the Tennessee Bar Association. The Campaign is funded through a grant from the National Right to Vote Campaign (<http://www.righttovote.org/>).

For inquiries about the Town Hall meetings, contact Michele Flynn at 615-320-7142.